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# MEMOIRS

OF THE

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE

OF THE

RIGHT HONORABLE

**R. B. SHERIDAN,**

WITH

*A particular Account*

OF

HIS FAMILY AND CONNEXIONS.

---

BY

JOHN WATKINS, LL.D.

---

Tanta est rerum discordia in ævo,  
Et sub texta malis bona sunt, lacrymæque ; sequuntur,  
Vota, nec in cunctis servat fortuna tenorem,  
Usque adeo permixta fuit, nec permanet unquam,  
Amisitque, fidem variando cuncta per omnes.

MANILIUS.

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*Second Edition,*

EMBELLISHED WITH PORTRAITS.

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## ERRATUM.

A slight mistake has occurred in the account of Richard Tickell, in the Twenty-third Chapter: that unfortunate man having taken for his second wife, not the Miss Leigh, or Lee, of Bath, under whom his daughter was educated, but Miss LEY, the Daughter of Captain Ley, of the East India marine service.

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WHILE the nation was rejoicing in the commemoration of that great event which settled the constitution upon a permanent basis, and while one sentiment actuated all parties in celebrating the

blessing that opened a way to the accession of the House of Brunswick to the throne of these realms; a cloud arose to damp the cheerful feeling, and spread dismay and jealousy throughout the land. His Majesty having been for some time troubled with a bilious complaint, was advised, in the preceding summer, to try the Cheltenham waters; from which, and an excursion through the midland counties, he appeared to have received material benefit. But about the middle of October, some unpleasant rumours were circulated respecting the nature and degree of his malady; to dispel which, and appease the public anxiety, a levee was held at St. James's, on the twenty-fourth of that month. This measure, however, though it might have a momentary effect in stilling the public fears, was highly improper, as having a tendency to produce irritation where the restoration of health required calmness and seclusion. This was proved, indeed, soon afterwards; for on the king's return to Windsor, his disorder assumed a very alarming aspect; and by the second week in November he was universally known to be in a state of complete delirium. This melancholy intelligence naturally drew the leading persons of different parties to the metropolis, that they might be in readiness to act as the exigency of affairs should require: and as the Prince of Wales had long been closely connected with the opposition, the principal members of this class were more than commonly active on



the present occasion. Mr. Fox was then in Italy for his health ; but an express was instantly dispatched to hasten his return with as much speed as if the welfare of the state had depended upon his presence. In the mean time the most assiduous attentions were paid to his royal highness by those who anticipated a change in the administration as the necessary result of his entrance into the full exercise of the regal authority. Among the chief favourites at Carleton House was Mr. Sheridan, whose zeal for the interests of his royal patron was far from being tempered with that prudence which became the confidential adviser of a prince upon whom the public attention was now fixed with more than ordinary anxiety.

The parliament, which had been prorogued to the twentieth of November, met, of course, on that day, and then adjourned to the fourth of the following month ; previous to which a meeting of the privy council was held, for the purpose of obtaining the evidence of the physicians who were in attendance on the king, all of whom were agreed in their description of the disorder, and the probability of a recovery, though none of them could presume to assign any period for the cure. This concurrent opinion, however, of the medical men upon the degree of the complaint was sufficient of itself to shew the necessity of restricting the powers to be vested in the regency, which, from the personal incapacity of the king, it was now

the indispensable duty of the legislature to supply. The proceedings of the privy council being reported to parliament, a further adjournment of both houses took place till the eighth of December, when it was proposed by Mr. Pitt that a committee of twenty-one members should be appointed for the examination of the physicians. Two days afterwards, the committee presented their report; and another was then moved for by the minister, to examine the journals, and report precedents of such proceedings as could be found in cases of the suspension of the royal authority by infancy, sickness, or otherwise, with a view to provide for the exercise of the same. To such a proposition one would hardly suppose that the smallest objection could have been made, especially by those persons who were the zealous advocates for the power of parliament in regulating and restraining the prerogative of the crown. But by a fatality which sometimes leads the wisest men into the strangest inconsistencies, Mr. Fox, at the very outset of the business, opposed the motion which had been made by the minister as wholly nugatory, and at the same time advanced this position, "that whenever the sovereign, from sickness, infirmity, or other incapacity, was unable to exercise the functions of his high office, the heir apparent, being of full age and capacity, had as clear and express a right to assume the reins of government, and exercise the power of sovereignty, as in the

case of His Majesty's natural demise." This assumption of right on the part of the Prince of Wales was immediately controverted by the minister, who took an advantage, from what had been advanced by Mr. Fox, to urge the absolute necessity of the measure which he had proposed; for, as Mr. Pitt very forcibly argued, the bare intimation of a claim of right rendered it a matter of consequence to ascertain, from precedent and history, whether there was any foundation for it; since, if such an authority should be discovered, farther deliberation in that house on the subject would be unnecessary. In the mean time, however, the minister had no hesitation in maintaining that the assertion of such a right in the Prince of Wales, or any one else, was little short of treason against the constitution of the country. Mr. Pitt proceeded with the same frankness to observe, that while he avoided the discussion of the principle, he would pledge himself to prove, that in the case of the interruption of the personal exercise of the royal authority, without the existence of any lawful provision previously made for carrying on the government, it belonged to the other branches of the legislature, on the part of the nation at large, to provide according to their discretion, for the temporary exercise of the regal functions in the name and on the behalf of the sovereign, in such manner as they should deem requisite: and that the Prince of Wales had no more right of himself,

without their decision, to assume the government, than any other individual subject in the country.

Mr. Fox, in reply, was driven to the necessity of defending the right which he had advanced on the principle of an hereditary sovereignty. He was followed by Mr. Burke, who attacked the minister with his accustomed powers of sarcastic raillery, and represented him as a competitor with the prince for the regency, and as threatening the assertors of the right of his royal highness with the penalties of constructive treason.

The petulance of Burke called forth one of those pertinent illustrations for which his great antagonist was remarkably felicitous, and which, in the present instance, he applied with equal force in repelling an illiberal accusation, and in strengthening the constitutional ground which he had taken: "At that period of our history," said Mr. Pitt, "when our constitution was settled on its present foundation, when Mr. Somers and other great men declared that no person had a right to the crown independent of the two houses of parliament, would it have been either fair or decent for any one to pronounce Mr. Somers a personal competitor with King William?"

The doctrine that had been started by the opposition with regard to the abstract rights of the heir apparent was also strongly animadverted on in the House of Lords by the venerable Earl Camden, president of the council; which induced Mr. Fox



to take the first opportunity of vindicating himself and explaining his meaning, when the committee of precedents brought up their report. On that occasion he complained heavily of having been misrepresented in another place, and made to say, that the Prince of Wales had a right to assume the royal authority, in consequence of the incapacity of the king, when he only meant that the claim, as of right, was in the prince, but that the adjudication of possession lay in the other branches of the legislature. This refined distinction he followed up by recommending the house to present a declaration or address to his royal highness, investing him, during the incapacity of His Majesty, with the full exercise of all the royal powers, in the same manner, and to the same extent, that they would be enjoyed by the king had his health remained unimpaired.

To have acted upon this proposition would have been an admission, on the part of parliament, of the very inherent right, which was a matter of question, and remained to be proved. Mr. Pitt, therefore, still continued inflexibly to resist the claim, notwithstanding the subtle modification in which it was now involved by political casuistry; for nothing in reality could be more absurd than to make parliament a mere instrument, by giving it the privilege of adjudication, without the power of deliberation and refusal. The question was one of vital importance, which

affected the essence of the constitution, and with which the private virtues of the Prince of Wales had no concern. It was a new case, and nothing certainly could be found in the English history that was perfectly analogous to the exigency. The revolution may be regarded as bearing in principle the nearest resemblance to it; for at that period the regal authority was in fact suspended by an abandonment on the part of the sovereign; in which crisis the convention parliament did not indeed appoint a regency, but it went farther, and filled the throne. Now it could not be denied, that if the former measure had been considered as most adviseable for the public benefit and the permanent security of the constitution, a regency would then have been adopted, in preference to the act which gave the vacant crown to the Prince of Orange. This was a precedent so completely in support of the parliamentary right to supply any deficiency that may possibly arise in the exercise of the royal authority through the moral incapacity of the sovereign, that it may well excite astonishment how men who made a boast of being guided by the principles of the revolution could pass it over in silence, or endeavour to evade its application. But when the purposes of a party are to be served, men of the greatest ability and the loftiest sentiments will not scruple to make sacrifices which they would be the first to condemn with the utmost severity in others. That this

assertion of a right to the regency, without the express appointment of parliament, arose from the connexion which subsisted between the prince and the party in opposition, cannot admit of a doubt ; and it exhibits a memorable instance of political inconsistency, and the little confidence that is to be placed in professions of public virtue. Upon the whole, however, a material advantage resulted from this temerity in putting forward the claim of right on the behalf of the prince, as it reduced ministers to the necessity of bringing the question to an issue, that the legality of the measures to be adopted might be settled, and that in future no disputes might arise in cases of a similar emergency. But though Mr. Fox was the first to start the subject, and though the party of which he was the leader made a great outcry against Mr. Pitt for having represented the alleged right as dangerous and unconstitutional, nothing was more disagreeable to them than the intention which he avowed of coming to a decision upon the question, which had been agitated previous to the arrangement of the necessary measures for the supply of the royal functions, which were now in a state of suspension. Thus the indiscreet zeal of the party, who were eager for the establishment of that government in which they expected to hold the principal influence, occasioned a delay which produced, in every stage of the business, new triumphs to the minister, and ended at last in the

complete mortification of his opponents. Mr. Sheridan seems to have foreseen the consequences of this precipitancy of his friends ; but in the alarm which he felt on the declaration of Mr. Pitt, he had recourse to language little calculated to divert that great man from his purpose, or to make a favourable impression upon the house. After reprobating with great vehemence the discussion of a proposition, which, instead of conciliating, might create dissensions and animosities, Mr. Sheridan warned the right honourable gentleman against provoking that claim to be asserted which had not yet been preferred. Now, though this might be considered, and perhaps was intended as a gauntlet thrown down to the minister, it was, in fact, an impeachment of the right of parliament to settle a regency in cases where the moral capacity of the sovereign is suspended, and to limit the powers of those who may be called to the exercise of the royal authority during that deficiency. This tone of defiance was even more imprudent and unbecoming than the hasty advancement of pretensions on the part of the prince, which had already roused the attention of parliament, and excited considerable apprehensions among the people. Thus the headlong eagerness of the persons who affected the greatest zeal for the constitution, and the warmest attachment to the royal family, made the illustrious personage whose cause they espoused an object of suspicion



throughout the country. Knowing the footing on which these advocates of an unlimited regency stood at Carleton House, it was natural for independent men, and the public at large, to view their proceedings with some degree of jealousy. Whatever came from this quarter on a subject so generally interesting to the nation, was properly considered as bearing the stamp of authority, and conveying an expression of the royal sentiments. When, therefore, Mr. Fox originally hazarded the question of right, in manifest contradiction to the political principles which he had hitherto maintained, the obvious inference in the minds of most impartial men was, that he had been called from Italy expressly for the purpose of broaching this new doctrine; and it was still more generally concluded, that when his friend Sheridan afterwards dared the minister to bring the claim of the prince before parliament, he had the highest sanction for the conduct which he pursued, and the language which he uttered. It was scarcely to be imagined, that any person, professedly in the confidence of the prince, would, without authority, have denied the right of parliament to investigate the grounds of a claim which, in its very nature, would have had an extensive and indefinite influence upon the privileges of the crown and the liberties of the people. What fell from Mr. Sheridan in the course of this debate was therefore considered, both by the house and the minister,

in a very important light, as expressive of something like a protest against the legislative power of parliament to enter upon the question of right; and Mr. Pitt, in consequence, observed, "that he trusted the house would do its duty in spite of any threat, however high might be the authority from which it proceeded."

The situation in which Mr. Sheridan had now involved himself was awkward enough; but the effect which it was calculated to produce in regard to his royal patron was of a much more serious nature; for it had the direct tendency to place the Prince of Wales in a state of personal competition with the two houses of parliament in a matter of the highest and most grave consideration with respect to legislative jurisdiction. It was impossible, therefore, for the minister to pass over the declaration slightly, or to regard it as the mere effusion of zeal on the part of the speaker, who was universally known to have a commanding influence in the cabinet council of the prince. Mr. Sheridan was aware of the error which he had committed, and he endeavoured to retrieve it by denying that his language could be construed into a threat, and observing that it was merely an hypothetical statement of the danger that would arise, should the prince be provoked to urge a claim which he had not as yet preferred. This explanation, however, was too sophistical and flimsy to receive much attention; and it was

easy to see that if any danger or mischief attended the discussion of the asserted right, the blame lay with those who had started the question, and not with the ministers, whose duty it was to accept the challenge, and set the matter at rest where only it could be lawfully determined. The necessity of this resolution became still more urgent, if possible, from the very explanation which Mr. Sheridan had just made ; for therein he still continued to maintain the claim as a dormant right, which the prince might, at a future period, be advised to bring forward whenever such a measure should appear convenient to himself or his friends. Considerable alarm now began to prevail among the members of the opposition, the whole body of whom saw clearly enough that the claim which had been so injudiciously and prematurely set up, was too questionable to be supported, and too unpopular to be carried. Every exertion was therefore made to prevent the formal discussion of a point which the party that advanced it would not totally abandon as untenable, while they were sensible of their incapacity to defend its validity. Some of the royal family endeavoured to prevail upon ministers to wave the discussion of this delicate subject ; but their entreaties were ineffectual, and Mr. Pitt, on the sixteenth of December, carried, through a committee of the House of Commons, three resolutions, the substance of which was, that, as the royal authority

was suspended, it became the right and duty of parliament then assembled to provide the means for supplying the deficiency in such manner as the exigency of the case might require. This was not only a death-blow to the claim that had been so pertinaciously asserted, but it was a clear indication that whatever regency should be adopted, would be restricted in its powers by legislative enactments.

The latter conclusion, indeed, could not well be avoided, when the principle was once established that parliament alone was competent to make provision for the exercise of the regal functions during the personal incapacity of the sovereign. This consequence was felt by the leaders of the opposition, who, being fearful of the limitations which might be adopted by the majorities, now decidedly with ministers in both houses, determined to persevere in supporting the ideal right, which they had created in order to combat with it those restrictions which they were apprehensive would place the object of their own ambition at an indefinite distance. In the debate on the ministerial resolutions, Mr. Fox betrayed great irritation of temper while endeavouring to vindicate himself from the charge of a dereliction of principles; but the only thing urged by him in the shape of an argument on the question of the parliamentary right to nominate a regency, was the allegation, that by so doing the monarchy



would no longer be hereditary but elective. The most satisfactory refutation of this extravagant position was to be found in the proceedings of the assembly where it was delivered; for, however mortifying the same might be to the feelings of a party, it could not be fairly denied that the whole manifested a jealous watchfulness over the constitutional rights of the throne, and a careful anxiety to restore the royal authority unimpaired to its legitimate possessor upon the recovery of his mental faculties. Parliament was not then engaged in disposing of the crown, but in securing the exercise of its most essential functions for the public benefit, till such time as the sovereign in being should be fully capacitated to discharge the important duties of his high station. A material distinction arose out of this fact, which completely destroyed the fallacious reasoning of those, who, by their conduct, seem to have regarded the throne itself as vacant, and unjustly withheld from him, who alone, in the case of actual demise, would have had the right to fill it. As one act of imprudence generally begets another, Mr. Fox, who had incautiously hazarded the position of an abstract right in the prince to take upon him the reins of government, now ventured to announce himself and his friends as the intended successors of the existing ministers, a declaration, which, at that period, and under all circumstances, was far from being calculated to impress upon the public mind a favour-

able opinion of that change which was about to take place. This confident anticipation of power, while the great council of the nation was engaged in deliberating on the means of providing for an urgent state necessity, could not be vindicated on any other plea than that of political expediency, as tending to influence those vacillating minds who might be in a state of hesitancy between a regard to old connexions, and the desire of profiting by a new state of things. With an avowal of such expectations, it ill became Mr. Fox to charge the minister, in the course of the same speech, as having been so long possessed of power that he could not endure to part with it, and of being at least resolved to ruin that which he could no longer be permitted to enjoy.

A denunciation of this nature was easy of retort with accelerated force and much surer aim, for the ambition of Mr. Pitt could have at least nothing more than an ephemeral gratification, while that of his opponents extended its prospects not merely within the temporary circle of a provisional government, but far and wide, through all the rich and growing advantages of a new reign. This frank declaration, that a change in the administration was already settled in the cabinet council of the prince, afforded an opportunity to Mr. Pitt of shewing strongly the interested motives by which his adversaries were guided in their present conduct, and of inferring from thence the still greater neces-

sity of guarding against the abuse of those powers with which the regent might be invested, surrounded as he was by advisers who felt no scruple in making a boast of their own pretensions. By thus mixing the hopes of the party with the concerns of the prince, the cause of both suffered considerably in the public opinion, as appeared beyond all question in the support which ministers received at a time when their continuance in office wholly depended upon the uncertain event of the king's speedy recovery. Nothing therefore could be more absurd or inconsistent than the accusation of ambition which was so vehemently brought against them by those persons, who, according to their own admission, were at that very moment impatient to possess their places, being equally regardless of the sentiments of the nation, and of the probable feelings of the sovereign himself, whenever he should be in a state to resent the advantage that had been taken of his malady. Yet this charge of ambition was urged with additional vehemence a few days afterwards by Mr. Sheridan, who represented Mr. Pitt as acting in a spirit of personal enmity to the prince: and he concluded a desultory speech full of invective, with asking whether any person would advise his royal highness to say—"I accept the regency under the limitations you propose, which I think are improper, and which I hope parliament will annul?" Now at this very time the speaker knew that

both he and his friends had actually recommended the acceptance of the regency, let the parliamentary restrictions be what they might; and it was admitted just before in this same speech that the prince would consent to the limitations of his authority. This was a strange contradiction, for it could not be supposed that the assent so unreservedly promised would be the single act of the prince, without the concurrence of those persons who were known to be his confidential advisers. It was, therefore, an idle flight of oratory to say, that none of these political friends would venture to give such counsel to his royal highness, and yet at the same time to acknowledge in the same breath that his acceptance of the government might be relied upon whenever parliament should have settled the conditions. This was, in fact, an admission that the prince had a council for whose judgment he entertained a much greater respect than for the decisions of the two legislative branches of the constitution, though, as a matter of prudence, he could not follow his inclination. It appeared, however, a few days afterwards, that notwithstanding the bold declaration of Mr. Sheridan, with respect to the firmness of his party in withholding their advice to the prince on the subject of his acceptance of the regency, they did actually not only recommend his compliance, but even draw up in his name a protest against the restrictions with which the office was intended to be clogged.



On the thirtieth of December, Mr. Pitt submitted to the prince an outline of the plan which had been prepared by the cabinet for parliamentary consideration, respectfully soliciting permission to explain the same, either in person or in writing, as his royal highness should think proper to order. But instead of giving the minister the opportunity which he requested, an answer was returned, containing a long and laboured complaint against the paper, as exhibiting “a project for producing weakness, disorder, and insecurity, in every branch of the administration of affairs—a project for dividing the royal family from each other, for separating the court from the state, and therefore by disjoining government from its natural and accustomed support—a scheme for disconnecting the authority to command service from the power of animating it by reward, and for allotting to the prince all the insidious duties of government, without the means of softening them to the public, by any one act of grace, favour, or benignity.”

This injudicious and ill-advised remonstrance went still farther than all this, by treating lightly the powers and prerogatives of the crown, as being no otherwise necessary than in an auxiliary subservience to the preservation of the poise and balance of the constitution. To what purpose such reasoning was introduced into a paper of this nature it would be difficult to surmise, since the principle of it had nothing apparently to do with

the subject of the regency ; and, what was worse, it went the length, if pushed to its consequences, of destroying all the hereditary rights for which the framers of this curious protest were at that very time the most furious advocates. After lamenting in a querulous strain the degraded state, curtailed authority, and diminished energy of the government now proposed, the advisers of the prince, in flat contradiction to what Mr. Sheridan had averred in their name, concluded with expressing a determination to undertake the painful trust, to prevent the evils which might otherwise arise to the king's interests, the peace and happiness of the royal family, and the safety and welfare of the nation. The party spirit breathing throughout this declaration ill became the illustrious personage in whose name it was composed ; and the argument on the supposed injustice of limiting the executive government conveyed a strong reflection upon the wisdom and integrity of the two legislative branches of the constitution, by whom the full exercise of that power had already been recognized as both a natural right, and a positive duty.

This celebrated paper, copies of which were circulated with the greatest industry, has been confidently ascribed to the pen of Mr. Burke, who is said to have been now, for the first time, introduced at Carleton House by his friend Sheridan. The story, however, does not seem

entitled to much credit, for the internal character of the paper is too vapid and heavy for the genius of Burke, whose ardent mind would assuredly have diffused vigour into the composition, and the correctness of whose judgment would as certainly have preserved it from the charge of inelegance and grammatical deficiency. Besides, it is not likely that Burke would have presumed to interweave into a document of this nature sentiments which were derogatory to the dignity of the crown, and amounting to the concession that the people have a right to curtail and take away the regal prerogatives at their pleasure. In the warmth of debate, the irritable temper of Burke sometimes hurried him into strange flights of extravagance; and he would, for the sake of enforcing his own positions, or ridiculing those of others, bring together the most heterogeneous objects; but though in the course of these proceedings he too frequently insulted the feelings and the taste of his hearers by odious comparisons, he never diverged into the republican jargon, that government is of popular creation, and its privilege nothing more than a matter of public convenience. Burke was a violent politician, but he was too wise a man to espouse notions which could not be carried into practice without producing universal anarchy; and however loosely he might occasionally argue in public assemblies, it is not to be supposed that he would assert in the name of the prince doctrines which he

did not himself believe to be true. The zeal of Burke in defending the claims of his royal highness at this juncture, though inflammatory enough, was more in unison with the exploded system of the divine right of hereditary monarchy than favourable to the voice of the people. If, therefore, Burke was either the sole author of this paper, or any way concerned in drawing it up, the utmost that can be said is that the circumstance affords another lamentable instance of the political inconsistencies into which the greatest men are liable to run, when they suffer themselves to be harnessed in the trammels of a party. But this document was not more unworthy of the eminent writer to whom it has been so confidently attributed, than it was beneath the exalted dignity of the personage for whose use, and in whose name, it was deliberately composed. Nothing could be more improper than to represent the prince as betraying particular uneasiness about the want of power to confer those rewards and distinctions upon his adherents, which he could not but be sensible must prove disagreeable to his royal parent in the event of his recovery. This desire of prerogative, for the purposes of gratifying private ambition, was as little to be justified as the attempt to gain popularity by flattering the passions and prejudices of the multitude.

But the little regard which the advisers of the prince had for appearances was evinced in almost every



stage of this business, and in none more remarkably, or disgustingly, than in their studied endeavours to prove that the malady of the king was irremediable.

In the committee appointed by the House of Commons for the examination of the physicians, the most rigorous and perplexing questions were put to those gentlemen who had ventured to express their hopes of a recovery; but Dr. Willis, whose judgment in such cases enabled him to speak with the greatest confidence, was exposed to a much closer interrogation, and compelled to endure more painful remarks than any of his colleagues.

Even in obstinate complaints, where the mind is unaffected, medical observers may see latent indications of a favourable nature which they cannot easily explain to others, though the signs of recovery may be sufficiently satisfactory to themselves. But in disorders of the brain, the symptoms on which the experienced practitioner grounds his expectations of returning reason are still more difficult of elucidation, being generally of so refined and subtle a texture as to have in appearance rather a tendency to increase fear than to generate hope. In all cases of this description, however, the interests of humanity will incline the judicious attendant to cherish whatever holds out the slightest promise of convalescence, as an excitement to professional diligence, and a support for the afflicted. Even

where the intellect seems shrouded in darkness, and every attempt to recall it into action proves ineffectual, the intelligent practitioner will be the last to relax in his attentions, knowing on what slender and imperceptible movements the restoration of consciousness may depend. He who thus acts in the treatment of one of the most deplorable and intricate of human ailments will sometimes be mistaken in his judgment, and often be disappointed in his expectations, yet surely he cannot be justly censured for errors where certainty is unattainable, nor ought he to be condemned for indulging those hopes which are the animating stimuli to perseverance in duty. The disorder under which His Majesty laboured was of a character that fully warranted this line of conduct on the part of his medical attendants, who would, in fact, have been highly reprehensible if they had deported themselves in such a way as to depress the anxious hopes of a loyal and affectionate people.

Had the symptoms of the disease been more perplexing and obstinate than they really were, the physicians would have deserved commendation for endeavouring to soothe the public mind as much as possible, by holding out the prospect of a cure. But morality has seldom much connexion with political feelings; and that which would be considered as an indispensable rule of action in the common concerns of life, will be dressed up in the most odious colours when

it happens to thwart the purposes of ambition. Dr. Willis, who, as a man of simple manners and conscientious principles, had no idea that a favourable report of His Majesty's situation could possibly give offence to loyal minds, very naturally delivered his opinion with the confidence of one, who, being satisfied himself, thought that he should, at least, escape reproach, though he might not perhaps obtain entire credence. But the doctor was mistaken; for his sentiments were treated as impertinent, and his practice was censured as empirical.

His long established reputation could not secure him from the illiberal accusation of charlatanism, nor his age and profession from sarcasm and abuse. The freedom with which he spoke on a subject that was familiar to him was represented as flippancy, while his prudence in avoiding to commit himself by positive predictions was described as evasion. The support which Dr. Willis received from the ministerial side of the house, and the reliance which it was known that Her Majesty placed upon his judgment, contributed to render him an object of particular dislike to the opposition, who worried him without mercy in the committees, and laboured by every means to undervalue him in the estimation of the public. In this business Mr. Sheridan took the lead, and he managed it with an address which did more credit to his wit than his discretion; for, however happy he might be in



perplexing the doctor with questions which could not be directly answered, he created a suspicion that the zeal employed to disparage the medical evidence arose from a wish that the cure might never be effected. This, perhaps, was a harsh and ill-natured surmise; and yet from the manner in which the operations of the party were conducted, and from their unwarrantable severity towards those professional persons who entertained the most sanguine expectations of a recovery, it was natural to conclude that the feelings of desire for power and place had overcome all other considerations, and smothered more generous sentiments.

In the course of these debates on the regency, Mr. Sheridan had an opportunity of evincing the extent of his reading, and the correctness of his memory, by setting Lord Belgrave right with respect to a passage from Demosthenes, applied by him to the opposition. His lordship was fond of Greek quotations, but in this instance he was rather unfortunate in his selection, by adopting a line which was a bitter reproach of the Athenians for wasting their time in enquiries about the state of Philip's health, instead of making preparations for the defence of their country. Mr. Sheridan, having repeated the passage, with the context, and explained it satisfactorily, shewed its general irrelevancy to the present case; though, in justice to the noble lord, it is fair to say that the censure passed by the Grecian orator upon his



countrymen might tropically, and by adaptation, have been properly applied to those members of the British parliament who were industrious in gathering from the dissonance of professional opinions inferences unfavourable to the national hope and energy.

Among the various reasons assigned for limiting the powers of the regent, one of the most offensive to the party was that which stated the apprehension that he might be surrounded by evil advisers. This was so direct an attack upon the great advocates for the natural right of the prince to the full exercise of the regal authority, that silence under it would have indicated timidity, or that studied indifference which nearly resembles the consciousness of impropriety. It was not, therefore, a matter to be wondered that Mr. Sheridan should enter upon an elaborate vindication of the friends with whom he was associated; nor perhaps was he much to blame for mingling with his panegyric some strong animadversions upon the minister who had provoked the retort. After remarking on the frequent attacks of this kind which had been made on the political party to which he belonged, Mr. Sheridan proceeded to observe, "that as for himself he made no scruple to declare he thought it the glory and honour of his life to belong to that party. He who knew the character of the party, knew it was an honour which any man might covet. Was it a disgrace

to have been formed under the Marquis of Rockingham; and under his banners to have combated on behalf of the people with success?— Was it a disgrace to be connected with the Duke of Portland, a nobleman who, swayed by no mean motives of interest, nor influenced by any ambitious designs to grasp at power, nor with a view to any other purpose than the welfare of the country, dedicated his mornings unremittingly to the promotion of the public good?” Having thus eulogized the dead and the living heads of the party, Mr. Sheridan went on in the same strain of affectionate eloquence to compliment his friend Fox, the characteristic distinction of whose heart, he said, was to compel the most submissive devotion of mind and affection from all those who came under the observation of it; and to force them, by the most powerful and amiable of all influence, to become the inseparable associates of his fortune. With respect to his talents, he would not speak of them; they would neither derive support from any man’s attestation, nor from the most flattering panegyric of the most enlightened of his friends. “Thus much,” Mr. Sheridan added, “he must be permitted to observe with regard to the abilities of his honourable friend, that it was the utmost effort of any other man’s talents, and the best proof of their existence, that he was able to understand the extent, and comprehend the superiority of them. It was the pride and glory of his life

to enjoy the happiness and honour of his friendship; and he desired to be told, whether the Duke of Portland and Mr. Fox were less worthy of the confidence of their country, or more unfit to become ministers, because an arrogant individual chose presumptuously to load them with calumny? Were he an independent man, standing aloof from party, and wholly unconnected with it, he could not, with patience, hear the right honourable gentleman's insulting language; but, as a party man, boasting himself to be one, how did the right honourable gentleman imagine he should receive his reflections, but with that scorn and disdain which became a man conscious of the worth and value of those with whom he was connected?"

But however natural and commendable it was for Mr. Sheridan to resent in warm language the reflections and insinuations which had been thrown out against his friends, it will hardly be contended that his encomium on their merits amounted to a justification of their conduct as the advisers of the prince. Allowing them to have been all honourable men in the strictest sense of the phrase, and most amiable characters in private life, yet with regard to the particular circumstances of the exigency on which their talents were actively employed, they might for all that be mischievous counsellors to his royal highness and the

nation, by introducing such innovations as they were well aware would prove personally offensive to the king in the event of his recovery.

Every man in the kingdom knew that these persons had formerly lost the confidence of their sovereign by having brought forward changes which were obnoxious to his sentiments; and therefore as the revival of those measures was the least that could be expected, it was easy to anticipate what would be the effect on the royal mind when reason should resume its seat, and enquire what advantage had been taken of the suspension of its powers. As a breach of the most serious nature between the father and the son would inevitably have been the consequence of such proceedings, it was far from being unjust or indecorous to say of the men who should recommend the adoption of them that they would be evil advisers. The responsibility of his ministers would have been a miserable shield for the protection of the prince from the reflections of his parent, and the censure of the nation, when the question came why the ambition of a party was consulted rather than the feeling of the monarch and the opinion of the people. The reproach of Henry the Fourth on the bed of sickness to his son would neither have been so keen nor deserved as that which might have issued from the embittered mind of George the Third on awakening from the dream of ideal



confusion to the recollection of his former greatness, the sense of his duties, and the contemplation of his crown, now "shorn of its beams."

In perusing the debates which took place at this critical period, it is scarcely possible for the most insensible or prejudiced person to avoid being struck by the indifference with which the condition of the king was treated on that side of the house where every member appeared most tenderly alive to whatever seemed to affect the rights and claims of the prince. That which touched the sympathy of the public at large seemed to interest the party in opposition no otherwise than as it placed the attainment of power nearer within their grasp. The prospect spread before them blunted their sensibility, and the rising splendour which gilded their horizon served to throw into shade all that agitated the fears and hopes of other men. It was painful to notice the phlegmatic coldness and sententious brevity with which Mr. Fox spoke of the calamity that had fallen upon the king; but this was nothing compared to the acrimonious virulence of Burke, and the unseasonable levity of Sheridan. Nothing, indeed, could be more disgusting than the odious reflections of the former on an affliction which has always commanded pity even among the least civilized part of mankind; and though the latter did not so completely shock the sensibility of his hearers by the coarseness of his language, he

certainly did little credit to the cause in which he was embarked by the sallies of his wit. The keen severity of his reply to Mr. Rolle, the member for the County of Devon, who had rather needlessly, as many were of opinion, ventured to revive the question of the marriage of the prince and Mrs. Fitzherbert, might perhaps be fully justified on account of the intimate knowledge which Mr. Sheridan must be supposed to possess on the subject. But this very solicitude to repel calumny, and to respect private feelings in one quarter, ought to have operated with as much force in restraining the orator from sarcastic allusions to the state of the king, and unbecoming remarks on the conduct of his royal consort. Instead of this, he indulged a wantonness of humour, and an asperity of expression, on the resolutions for regulating the care of His Majesty's person and household, which no circumstances could warrant, and which were in a high degree reprehensible, as coming from the particular friend of the prince. Though the desire of the queen to be entrusted with the charge of watching over His Majesty was well known, Mr. Sheridan did not scruple to represent this tenderness of affection as a weak compliance with bad advice. There was a strange want of prudence in this course of proceeding, since it tended to create an idea in the public mind, that the restoration of the king was less an object with the party than the security of their

own power in the perpetuity of the new government. Nor was their behaviour with respect to the domestic concerns of His Majesty calculated to remove this unfavourable impression, especially when Mr. Sheridan broadly asserted that the feelings of the king, on the renovation of his mental faculties, were less entitled to consideration than the inclinations of the prince to gratify his followers by a complete change in the royal household. It had been very properly observed, in support of the proposed restriction, that danger might arise of the most melancholy description, should His Majesty, on the recovery of his understanding, find that all his old servants were dismissed, and their places filled by men of whom he either had no knowledge, or whose principles and characters he disapproved. Strong and conclusive, however, as this reasoning undoubtedly was, it only served to sharpen the wit of Mr. Sheridan, who treated the attention which was paid to the royal feelings with a levity of humour that would at any time have been indecorous, but which, in the peculiar circumstances of the case, was highly imprudent and offensive. "The bad advisers of the regent," said he, "were to be allowed the power of making war, peace, treaties, and the exercise of various other important authorities. To talk, therefore, of His Majesty's feelings, when he should recover and find his household changed, was to suppose that



he would be more shocked at this than to learn that the constitution of his country was changed, part of his dominions ceded to foreign potentates, and other essential and important calamities and disgraces entailed on his country; which was like a man, who, having been entrusted with the mansion-house of a person during his incapacity to take care of it, should suffer it to go to ruin, and the winds of heaven to blow through almost every part of it, the inclosures to be broken down, the flocks of sheep to be shorn and exposed to the storms, and all left to ruin and decay, except a few looking glasses and worthless lumber that were locked up in an old-fashioned drawing-room."

It would be a waste of words, and an insult on the judgment of the reader, to enter into an examination of this strange mixture of extreme cases and incongruous comparisons; but the quotation was necessary, to mark the spirit of opposition in an affair that called for peculiar gravity and delicacy in the discussion, as much out of regard to the reputation of the prince as concern for the sufferings of his parents. Throughout the whole of these proceedings on the regency, Mr. Sheridan distinguished himself so conspicuously in the character of an accredited agent, that his declarations were regarded in a very different light from what they would have been in any other case, which rendered his indiscretion more glaring, because it tended to raise an injurious



suspicion that the intemperance of his language was not altogether unacceptable, where it might have been expected to meet with the most decided displeasure. The subject is not of that evanescent kind, which, being connected with the fleeting politics of the day, passes away into obscurity among the petty contentions that deserve to be forgotten; but it has become matter of history, both as a precedent and a warning, affording a rule for the guidance of statesmen, and a caution to princes in the formation of their friendships.

While the British parliament was thus engaged in providing for the deficiency in the executive government on constitutional principles, that of the sister kingdom took a very different course, and at once voted an address to the Prince of Wales, requesting him to assume the government of Ireland during the continuance of His Majesty's indisposition, and no longer.

The illegality of this act was rendered perfectly ridiculous by the blunders with which it was characterized, and the gross ignorance which distinguished the persons who hurried it forward with a rashness that looked as if they wanted to insult the parliament of Great Britain, or to cover their own with disgrace. In either case it must be admitted that they performed their work with effect, for nothing could be more offensive than a resolution to vest the regency of Ireland in the prince, before he was authorised to act in that

capacity by the legislature of England. Supposing, that out of resentment, after this, the two houses at Westminster had thought proper to place the government, during the king's indisposition, in a council of regency, which they might have done, and that the lords and commons of Ireland had persisted in their measure, the prince, by accepting the proposition, would have stood at the head of the state in one country, while he remained in the capacity of a subject in the other. But this was not the only absurdity that marked the proceeding; for the ludicrous recommendation to the prince to hold the regency during the indisposition of the king, and no longer, conveyed an insinuation that he might be tempted or advised to retain the situation after the recovery of his father. The regal authority, or in the curious language of the Irish parliament, the third estate of the realm being thus summarily provided for without condition or limitation, a commission of delegates was nominated to wait upon the prince with the address. Fortunately, however, his royal highness was delivered from the dangerous dilemma into which an acquiescence with this overture would have placed him, by an event that must have proved as great a relief to his mind as it afforded joy to the nation.

The convalescence of His Majesty put a stop to the proceedings on the regency in the British parliament, and of course terminated effectually

the commission of the Irish delegates, who were obliged to content themselves with an elegant dinner, and a complimentary speech from the prince, instead of returning, as they had expected, armed with the power of triumphing over their opposers. But if the conduct of the patriotic party in Ireland, on this occasion, was glaringly inconsistent and unconstitutional, the manner in which their address was received corresponded with it so exactly, that had the advisers of the prince designed to convert the whole business into burlesque by a travesty, they could not have succeeded more happily, when they made his royal highness observe, that "what had been done was a proof of undiminished duty to the king, of uniform attachment to the House of Brunswick, and of a constant attention to the maintenance of concord between the two kingdoms."

The paradox that this measure exhibited a proof of undiminished duty to the king, though it took no care of his interests, was exceeded, if possible, by the extravagant declaration that the proceeding tended to maintain concord, when its object was, in fact, the direct contrary. Happily, however, for the people of both nations, and not less for the good of the prince himself, the restoration of the monarch to the dominion of reason put an end to the public fears, and extinguished the dreaming hopes of intriguing politicians.

## CHAPTER XVII.

*Popularity of Ministers.—Spirit of Dissention among their Opponents.—Observations on the Conduct of Mr. Sheridan.—Association formed to prevent Schism.—Defensive Proceeding of the Irish Patriots.—Opposition to fortifying the West India Islands.—Debates on Ways and Means.—Excise on Tobacco opposed by Mr. Sheridan.—On lending Newspapers.—Motion for a Financial Committee.—Proposed Reform of Royal Scotch Burghs.*

THE recovery of His Majesty not only secured the ministry in their seats, but increased their popularity. It was now seen, in refutation of the haughty prediction of their opponents, that the measures proposed for the supply of the royal authority were neither considered by the king as derogatory to the dignity of his crown, nor injurious to the interests and honour of his family. The nation at large joined with the monarch in the approbation of these councils: and amidst the universal joy which prevailed on this happy occasion, a sentiment of gratitude was strongly expressed towards the men, who, by their firmness in a period of peculiar difficulty, had preserved the real dignity of the throne, and the rights of the people. This consolidation of power in the union of royal



confidence with public esteem exhibited a striking contrast to the state of the party in opposition, whose disappointment was rendered the more mortifying by the general exultation which it produced. To aggravate their chagrin, the spirit of discord began to manifest itself among them with strong indications of open schism; for some, whose expectations had been most sanguine, were so soured by defeat and disgrace, as to be ready to fall out with their compeers. It was broadly insinuated that ministers would not have attained their present elevation, had those who boasted their intimacy with the prince been less forward in their zeal, and more discreet in their proceedings.

The conduct of Mr. Sheridan, in particular, was distinguished throughout by a vehemence of hostility which many regarded as unjustifiable in itself, and injurious to the cause; while others, on account of their superior rank and influence, thought that he assumed too high a port, and affected to be a leader where he had no legitimate pretensions. Much of the contempt incurred in consequence of the absurd proceedings of the Irish parliament was attributed to a secret agency in which he was supposed to have been engaged; and this suspicion certainly received support from some remarkable passages in one of his speeches, defending the grounds of those proceedings, and recommending the whole measure as a model of

imitation. But whatever credit might be given to the panegyrist for the sincerity of his opinion, he could claim little for the propriety of his advice, to have adopted which the English parliament must have retracted its own avowed principles, and have rescinded those resolutions which were founded upon them.

Mr. Sheridan, in common with his friends, had certainly formed an idea that the disorder of the king was incurable; and this conviction alone made the party so determined in the mode of opposition which they inflexibly pursued, even in the very face of public expectation, and in defiance of medical experience. Had they been content at first with watching the progress of ministers, instead of rushing forward so impetuously as their competitors; and had they suffered the prince to have been established in the regency, according to the parliamentary regulations, instead of combating every inch for imaginary rights, though they might not immediately have gained a plenitude of power, they would at least have been saved from the ridicule of losing the substance by grasping at its shadow.

Yet much reason as they had to be displeased with themselves, and to censure the steps that had been rashly taken by some individuals in the connexion, it was not for the honour and interest of the party to indulge in charges and recriminations, which would have weakened their own

ranks, and strengthened the hands of government. Policy, therefore, dictated the necessity of suppressing private feeling to prevent an open breach; and the same principle suggested the utility of an association, to make the world believe that the body of opposition remained unbroken, and its spirit unsubdued. Such was the course adopted in England for the preservation of political unity among those who were apprehensive that without some such means of affiliation the system might sink still lower in the public estimation, and the great leaders in it be left almost without any support. In Ireland, another method was taken by the persons who had manifested such an uncommon eagerness to outstrip the legislature of England in paying their devotions to the rising sun. Conscious of the gross want of consistency and respect which had marked their precipitate resolutions and proceedings, these members of the Irish parliament, some of whom enjoyed places of great emolument, being justly fearful that government would take their conduct under consideration, entered into a confederacy, and signed an instrument, binding themselves under an obligation to resist all the measures of government, even to the very grant of the necessary supplies, should any of the fraternity be deprived of those employments and sinecures of which by this very act they proved themselves totally unworthy. The first public business which drew forth the powers

of opposition in the English parliament was the vote to grant a sum among the extraordinaries of the ordnance, for the fortification of some of the West India islands. Though the necessity of the measure was made fully apparent by the defenceless condition of those colonies, the proposition was resisted, on the strange plea, that should any of the islands fall into the hands of an enemy, the works would be turned against ourselves; and that in the case of an attack, the inhabitants would rather insist upon the surrender of the forts than run the risk of having their plantations destroyed. Such was the sophistry with which General Burgoyne and Mr. Courtenay endeavoured to lay our most valuable foreign settlements open to capture, or to create a spirit of discontent among the people, by telling them, that though we were ready to engross all the profit of an intercourse with them in time of peace, yet that in war they must shift for themselves. During the debate on this question, Courtenay, who felt personal enmity to the Duke of Richmond, with whom the measure was supposed to have originated, launched out in his usual strain of extravagance, for which he was called to order by the speaker, and defended with more zeal than prudence by his friend Sheridan. This interference drew from the chair some pointed observations on the duty of submitting to those rules which were indispensably necessary to the support of the dignity of the house, and the



regularity of its proceedings. Mr. Sheridan felt the force of the correction, and acknowledged the impropriety of what he had just before attempted to justify. With regard to the subject of the debate, he declined entering into the merits of it as a military concern, but contented himself with raising a new objection to the vote, on the ground that no specific estimate of the actual expense had been laid before the house. This argument, however, failed in making any impression, and the proposed grant was immediately voted without a division.

An opposition thus framed and conducted would hardly have been an object of serious apprehension at any period, but in the present circumstances it only contributed to increase the national confidence in ministers, by evincing the imbecility of their adversaries. Nor was the attempt made to shake the credit of Mr. Pitt with respect to the finances of the country, and the efficacy of his plans for their improvement, a whit more successful, though laboured with great energy, and managed with singular address.

At the opening of the budget for this year, it was stated, that notwithstanding the flourishing state of the country, and the progressive reduction of the national debt, of which four millions had already been liquidated, yet owing to some unforeseen expenses, and heavy incumbrances, a loan of one million was necessary to be raised upon

annuities, in the nature of a tontine, so that in time this debt would be extinguished by its own provisions and operation. However satisfactory the report might be, and judicious the mode by which it was proposed to remove the temporary pressure, it was quite sufficient for the purpose of Mr. Sheridan to find it admitted that there was an actual deficiency in the revenue, and an accumulated expenditure above the income. With his wonted acuteness and ingenuity, he endeavoured to shew that the exigency which called for an extraordinary supply did not arise from the contingencies that had been represented, and which he affected to consider as too insignificant for notice, but had its source, and was essentially involved in a system of finance which he felt no hesitation in characterizing as "a bubble that would inevitably burst in time, and dissipate the public illusions." In the same strain of gratuitous assertion and paradoxical declamation, the orator laboured to make it appear that the required loan of one million indicated a yearly diminution of double the amount.

When the report of the committee of ways and means was brought up the next day, Mr. Pitt observed that the income of the country had been on the increase during the last three years, and this, he said, was a fact admitted by Mr. Sheridan himself, who very naturally expressed his surprise at what was thus advanced, and declared, that so far from entertaining such a belief, or giving coun-

tenance to it, he regarded the circumstance of applying for the loan of a million as evidence sufficient of a defalcation in the revenue. He then went over his former arguments, or rather assertions, for reasoning was out of the case where all the data from which the conclusion of a deteriorated state of things was drawn, consisted of hypothetical assumptions and visionary complaints. The report of the committee of finance which had been appointed three years before, having been adduced with a degree of confidence, as affording satisfactory evidence of the prosperous state of the public resources, Mr. Sheridan in reply animadverted very strongly both on the report and those who made it, denominating the one a fallacious statement, and characterizing the authors as a set of interested persons connected with government, and therefore under the influence of the minister.

This language naturally excited indignation on the part of those who were so coarsely, though indirectly, accused of betraying their trust, by framing a report, the particulars of which they knew to be untrue: and therefore the Marquis of Graham, with becoming severity, repelled the imputation as equally illiberal and unfounded. The explanation of Mr. Sheridan was any thing but an apology; for though he protested that he intended nothing personal, and did not mean to charge the members of the committee with having done so intentionally, he still entertained the

opinion that they had deceived the house and the public. In conformity with this sentiment, and for the purpose of supporting his positions on the depreciation of the revenue, and the inadequacy of the means employed to provide for the necessities of the state, and at the same time to abridge effectually the national debt, Mr. Sheridan suggested the propriety of appointing a new committee, consisting of members unconnected with government, to examine into the actual condition of the finances. On this subject, a motion was soon afterwards made by him in a very long and elaborate speech, abounding in witty remarks and humorous descriptions, no less than in caustic reflections on the minister, and confident auguries of the failure of his financial system. Having entertained the house by his pleasantry, Mr. Sheridan introduced these propositions:

“That the report of the committee appointed in 1786, to examine and state the several accounts relating to the public income and expenditure, and to report the probable amount of the income and expenditure in future, does not appear to have been founded in fact, nor verified by experience:

“That for the three last years the expenditure has exceeded the income two millions, and may be expected to do so for three years to come:

“That no progress has hitherto been made in the reduction of the public debt:

“That there is no ground of rational expectation



that any progress can be made without a considerable increase of the annual income, or reduction of the expenses."

To substantiate these positions, a review was taken of the report of the committee, and a parade of calculation exhibited, to make it appear that in many important particulars the statements were inaccurate, and the inferences necessarily fallacious. The most ingenious part of this desultory speech lay in the close, when on enumerating the names of fifteen gentlemen, as members of a new committee, Mr. Sheridan sagaciously observed, that if "the Chancellor of the Exchequer declined meeting him on such fair ground, the public would readily assign the motive." This appeal to the people was curious enough, but it was calculated only to make an impression upon the superficial and unthinking part of the community; since to every discerning mind it must have been obvious that no minister could consent to such a measure, without by so doing admitting the truth of the premises which had been laid down as the ground of the proceeding. Mr. Sheridan must have been aware, at the time when he gave notice of his intended motion, that the principle of it was totally inadmissible by a parliament which had already sanctioned what was now averred, on his single authority, to be erroneous. Besides, the appointment of a committee under the circumstances, and for the reasons alleged, was rendered nugatory

by the statements and arguments adduced, since, if it was so easy for one member to make himself acquainted with the actual condition of the public income and expenditure, the same facility was open to others; and it could hardly be contended that, as the representatives of the people, the whole were not bound in a common obligation. The treatment which the motion experienced, being negatived without a division, clearly proved what a slight effect the arguments to recommend it had produced even upon the party whose interest was in a considerable degree affected by the question which it involved.

Among the means proposed for the improvement of the revenue at this time, that of subjecting the manufacture of tobacco to the excise laws was one which created great alarm throughout the country, and produced numerous petitions from the traders in that article. On this occasion, Mr. Sheridan was applied to by many of the manufacturers; and he advocated their cause with equal energy and ability in all the stages of the bill, though without being able to prevail upon the minister to recede from his design, or upon the house to reject the objectionable parts of the plan. In support of the new regulation, it was proved, that though tobacco to the amount of fourteen millions of pounds was annually brought into the kingdom, the duty was not paid for half the quantity. Independent of the injury which the

revenue of the country suffered from this enormous extent of smuggling, the illicit practice gave extraordinary advantages to the Americans, and enabled them to carry on a most lucrative trade upon our coasts, with comparatively very little risk. This contraband traffic was also attended with other consequences highly detrimental to the national interests, though profitable to individuals, as by affording peculiar facilities for smuggling in a variety of branches, it held out inducements to nefarious practices, which were not only injurious to the revenue, but destructive of the public morals. However obnoxious, therefore, the excise system might be in itself, yet there was no other mode of correcting the existing and growing evil, than by applying this inquisitorial power to the manufacture of an article of foreign growth, but of great consumption among all classes of persons in the country. The opposition set up to the new regulation was chiefly grounded on the offensive nature and severe operation of the excise laws, with the alleged injustice of exposing the secrets of manufacturers to the inspection of the revenue officers. On these points Mr. Sheridan expatiated with considerable force of argument and ingenuity of illustration; but his reasoning was weakened by the reflection, that if admitted, it would go to the length of destroying the most essential branches of the revenue, by withdrawing the checks upon smuggling in other professions. Nothing could be

more unfair than to deny the propriety of placing commodities of mere luxury under the excise laws, while, at the same time, such indispensable articles as candles, soap, and leather, were suffered to remain within the controuling inspection of that system. Mr. Sheridan, indeed, seems to have been aware of this consequence of his objection, and of the advantage which might be made of his arguments in support of it; for on the renewal of the subject in the ensuing session, he observed, in regard to the loss which might be sustained by taking off the restriction of the excise in this instance, "that there were some rights which were above all price, and for the want or loss of which no increase of revenue could be a compensation." The truth of this, as an abstract proposition, cannot be called into question; but unluckily for the service which the principle was impressed to support, it proved an enemy instead of a friend; for when men engage in manufactures under the protection of the state, those rights which belong to them in a private capacity are not to be set up as a covert under which they may with impunity enrich themselves to the injury of fair dealers, and the loss of the public. The eloquence of Mr. Sheridan, though powerfully adapted to agitate the feelings, failed alike in awakening sympathy for the suffering tobaccoists, and in rousing indignation at the extension of the excise laws. It appeared ridiculous that one description of traders should be



so clamorous against this visitation, when others, who had long been sensibly affected by it, remained silent; and the plea that hereby the secrets of the manufacturers would be exposed, looked rather like a dread of detection in something wrong, than any apprehension of the superior sagacity of an exciseman.

Another financial measure of the minister, which called forth the exercise of the versatile powers of Sheridan this session, was the imposition of an additional duty upon newspapers, accompanied by a clause restricting the venders of these publications from lending out the same for hire. When the clause was read in the committee, Mr. Sheridan objected to it as being intended to sacrifice the interests of the poor newsmen to those of the printers; but upon the tax itself he was much more severe, considering it in the light of a measure purposely hostile to the freedom of the press. With regard to the additional duty on advertisements, he said that it would prove rather a loss than an advantage to the revenue, by occasioning a reduction in the number, particularly in the staple articles furnished by auctioneers and booksellers. This prediction, like most other random assertions of the conjectural kind, thrown out in the heat of debate, has been amply refuted by the increase of newspapers, notwithstanding repeated additions of taxation. Colonel Phipps, since Lord Mulgrave, made a few slight observations on

this opposition to the new tax, and remarked, that if the honourable gentleman took the trouble to read one of the newspapers of the ensuing day, he would perceive that his arguments had most of them been answered before he entered the house. Though the obvious meaning of the colonel amounted only to this, that nothing new had been advanced by Mr. Sheridan in his objections to the measure, most of which had already been considered and refuted, he chose to give the intimation another colour for the sake of a good practical joke, observing "that he would certainly look the next day into that miraculous paper the honourable gentleman talked of, but he did not before know that the *Hibernian Journal* was printed in London; and no other paper he should have conceived would have made him answer arguments which he had never heard."

Of the high opinion entertained of Mr. Sheridan as a parliamentary orator at this period, a more remarkable proof could hardly be given, than that of his being selected by a great number of persons in Scotland to state their case, and to support their prayer for the correction of abuses. These petitioners, who were respectable inhabitants of the royal burghs, had not indeed to remonstrate against innovations of recent origin, nor to complain of the infringement of ancient rights; and yet, in appearance, their grievances were such as to justify resentment, and to call loudly for a legislative remedy.

The constitution of the burghs certainly exhibits a curious anomaly in the history of incorporations; for while each place has its separate jurisdiction and peculiar privileges, the whole together form a connected body, having a common system of legal government, over which the other courts of the kingdom have no controul. That an institution therefore of the standing of three centuries, and possessing so much internal power, with the right of sending representatives to parliament at the nomination of the magistracy, should in the lapse of time contract abuses, may be considered as no more than a necessary consequence of human establishments.

The original design of the royal grants to these corporate bodies was the concentration of trade, and the security of those persons who embarked in manufactures and commerce. Of the propriety of such exclusive systems for the encouragement of industry, and the protection of property, in the infancy of maritime states, there can be no doubt, since, without some extraordinary privileges, neither will the natives be stimulated to enterprise, nor foreigners be induced to settle among them. To this cause many foundations in the nature of monopoly owe their origin; but though the particular reason for which they were created may no longer exist, it does not therefore follow that they ought to be suppressed, or deprived of their chartered rights. So long as they are serviceable in their municipal character to the public benefit, and enjoy revenues

which have been acquired without injury to the state, or wrong to individuals, it is no more than common justice that their privileges should be respected, and their property be deemed sacred. It is natural, however, for those who have no share in the advantages of a corporation to regard the exclusion as a hardship, and to look upon the whole of its administration with suspicion. When many persons are thus affected, it is not difficult for them to draw up a strong representation of oppression, and an elaborate catalogue of abuses, which was the case of the complainants against the Scotch burghs, who had the advantage of popularity in the nature of their cause, and in the ingenuity of their advocate. But though Mr. Sheridan exerted his powers to the utmost to procure a change in the internal government of these burghs, all his arguments were unavailing; and the redoubled petitions on the subject, which were presented from session to session, were also unsuccessful. What appeared very extraordinary in this business, was the circumstance that, in a concern which required local knowledge, and an intimate acquaintance with the peculiar laws and customs of Scotland, the complaining burgesses should have resorted to a stranger for his parliamentary support, rather than to one of their own countrymen, who might be supposed better qualified in point of personal information to enforce the prayer of their petition. The singularity of an Englishman's



entering with zeal into the discussion of Scotch grievances could not escape notice; and even some of the members, who were united with Mr. Sheridan in general politics, censured his interference on this occasion as totally improper; while Mr. Dundas observed, "that it was not a little remarkable, that though there appeared occasionally a considerable difference in opinion among those gentlemen who represented the northern part of the kingdom, yet none of them could be found to espouse the cause of reform; but forgetting the animosities of party, they had confederated for the purpose of oppressing the poor burgesses of Scotland. The honourable gentleman, therefore, had been selected as the champion, who was to rescue them from the oppressions under which they had so long laboured: but as he could not acquire his knowledge of the subject from local acquaintance with the country, a long catalogue of their supposed grievances had been published for the honourable gentleman's information; and he now came forward with one simple proposition, the object of which was to overturn and repeal the whole constitution of the royal burghs of Scotland, established for four hundred years." The reply of Mr. Sheridan shewed how sensibly the sting of these remarks was felt, for he accused his opponent in bitter terms of illiberality, taxed him as the patron of corruption, then abused Mr. Pitt for having deserted the

cause of reform ; and after declaring his resolution to resist oppression wherever it might be found, professed his belief that he should ultimately succeed in removing the evils which he had been instructed to expose.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

*Contrast between England and France.—Revolution in the latter Country.—Conduct of Political Clubs in London.—Indiscreet Zeal of Dr. Price.—Unqualified Praise of the Revolution by Mr. Fox.—Eloquent Reply of Mr. Burke.—The Revolution Defended by Mr. Sheridan.—Separation in Politics and Friendship between him and Burke.—Ineffectual Attempt at a Reconciliation.—Causes that contributed to increase the Hostility.—Opposition to Mr. Pitt's Financial Measures.*

WHILE every part of the British dominions resounded with congratulations on the restoration of the monarch to the functions of reason and government, a spirit of insubordination was spreading on the continent, indicating in one country the horrors of civil war, and threatening all Europe with the destruction of social order. The contrast, indeed, exhibited at this period between France and England, was of such a nature as to afford a practical lesson for the instruction of nations and individuals, by shewing the danger of acting upon theories in policy, and by displaying the supreme advantage of an adherence to constitutional principles, in seasons of difficulty.

In whatever light the subject may be considered by trifling and sceptical minds, the serious observer of historical events will be disposed to admire the

direction of infinite wisdom in adapting the most afflictive dispensations as a security against greater evils. Thus the visitation of Providence, which, by exciting the sympathy of the people of England for their sovereign, made them sensible of his private virtues, and of the blessing of his government, proved an effectual antidote to that pestilential contagion which had already, through the example of France, begun to poison the moral and political atmosphere. In the one country an enlightened principle of loyalty prevailed, resulting from the experience that obedience to the laws is the best security of liberty; while in the other, the abstract right of the power of the people was made an engine for the introduction of anarchy, and the perpetration of every species of crime.

Still, as the French revolution could not pass without attracting general observation, it was natural that a favourable opinion should be entertained of it by those, who, enjoying freedom themselves, must have had a wish to see the same blessing extended to others. Accordingly, in the early stage of this tremendous convulsion, many persons of great worth and distinguished talent entered with warmth into the cause of the French patriots, over whose excesses they were disposed to throw a veil, when it was impossible to justify the atrocities which, in the name of liberty, were daily committed.

Some political clubs in London took a very



lively interest in the affairs of France ; and even when the most flagitious outrages were going on at Paris, Dr. Price preached a sermon at the meeting-house in the Old Jewry, celebrating the passing scenes as indicative of an occurrence corresponding with the advent of redemption. The same divine at the anniversary dinner of the Revolution Society, of which the late Lord Stanhope was chairman, proposed a congratulatory address to the French National Assembly, in which, among other strange declarations, the members of the club expressed “their particular satisfaction in reflecting on the tendency of the glorious example given in France to encourage other nations to assert the unalienable rights of mankind, and thereby to introduce a general reformation in the governments of Europe, and to make the world free and happy.”

Now at the very time when the French were thus complimented for their respect to the rights of human nature, and when the preacher applied to himself the song of Simeon on the occasion, saying, “now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation ;”—at this very moment the doctor and his friends well knew that in the capital of France neither rank nor property, virtue nor talent, could secure a man from the grossest outrage, if he was once suspected of being an aristocrat, which was the invidious name set upon every person who was marked out as an object of popular fury.

The proposed address was transmitted to the National Assembly, and an answer returned, which stimulated other societies of a similar character to follow the example; and thus a connexion was formed between the republican zealots of the two countries, to the manifest injury of both; for in France it acted as an incentive to greater changes, and brought into England new doctrines on the subject of government, subversive of all the principles on which legislative authority is founded.

Now, whatever excuse might have been found for those individuals who beheld in the agitated state of France the dawn of liberty, no reason could be given for the officious interference of private clubs in the public affairs of another state. This meddling disposition was no less disrespectful to their own government than it was offensive to the feelings of the French monarch; for it was the assumption of a character and importance to which the parties had no claim; and it had the direct tendency to foment jealousies, under the mask of friendship, between two powerful nations, which under all circumstances have ever been suspicious of each other. But the mischief did not end here, for the same society, which made itself conspicuous in holding out the right hand of fellowship to the French revolutionists, ventured to recommend their proceedings as deserving of imitation. Without considering the total dissimilarity of the two

countries, or waiting for the result of those changes which they admired, the club, of which Dr. Price was the oracle, framed an exhortation to the people on the duty of asserting natural rights, and suggesting the propriety of establishing village associations for the propagation of political knowledge. Nothing could be more absurd or disgusting than this exhibition of the French as a model, when it was notorious that these reformers had themselves no certain principles for their own guidance; and when every movement made by them only served to evince the extreme danger of recurring to the people for the correction of abuses, and the improvement of government. Yet when the gradations of order were blended in confusion, and all the ties of duty that bind men together for the peace of society and individual security were broken, the nation in which these evils prevailed, with all their consequent horrors, was commended as having taken the lead in the return to reason, while the people of other countries were urged to co-operate with her in the great work of regenerating human society. That an imposition so flattering to the basest passions of the multitude should meet with greedy attention among the ignorant and designing ought not to be wondered at; but how men of enlarged minds and liberal ideas could favour the delusion, or bestow praise upon the actors in it, may well excite astonishment. There were not wanting, however, men of brilliant

talents and high reputation to celebrate the turbulent scenes which had taken place in France, to vindicate the grounds on which they were performed, and to eulogize the revolutionary demagogues as the ornaments of their country, and the benefactors of mankind. Thus, soon after the opening of the British parliament in 1790, Mr. Fox, evidently with a premeditated design, laid hold of an occasion for the delivery of his sentiments on the subject of the passing events in France.

When the army estimates were laid before the house on the fifth of February, an objection was taken to them, on the plea that the extent of our military force was rendered unnecessary by the pacific disposition of foreign powers; and particularly by the internal disturbances which would prevent France from giving any molestation to her neighbours for many years. Having thus noticed the state of that country, Mr. Fox launched out into a preposterous eulogium upon the French guards, who had recently disobeyed their officers and joined the insurgents, thereby, as the orator said, "setting a glorious example to all the military of Europe."

Such was the light in which the worst species of treason was beheld by a British statesman, whose advice, if followed, would invest all soldiers with the terrible power of judging their superiors, and of determining for themselves the rule and measure of obedience. Little notice was taken of this



extravagant flight; for though Mr. Pitt defended the estimates with considerable force; he very judiciously wished to avoid the introduction of French affairs into the deliberations of an assembly to which they certainly had no relation, and where the discussion of them was calculated to do more harm than good. The ardent mind of Mr. Fox formed a striking contrast to the cautious and reserved temper of the minister; and accordingly, when the report on the estimates was brought up, he burst forth in a strain of more vehement eloquence on the revolution of France, which he compared without any scruple or limitation to that of England.

This speech was replied to at great length by Mr. Burke, whose acquaintance with French history, and the character of the people, far exceeded that of his friend, to whom, while he differed with him in opinion, he paid some elegant compliments for the riches of his mind and the amiable qualities of his heart. No man had paid a closer attention to the state of the continent than Burke; and his perspicacious judgment could not be deceived by those extravagant pretensions which too many well-meaning persons considered as the auguries of dawning liberty and happiness. Instead of contemplating the revolution with admiration, he regarded it as a frightful chaos, in which all the balances and counterpoises for the security of the state and safety of the people were rashly destroyed, and melted down into one incongruous mass.

When the National Assembly should have been employed in redressing grievances, and improving the constitution of their country, they laid the axe to the root of private property, and endeavoured, too successfully, to destroy the principles of religion and morality by confiscating the possessions of the church. For the old and tried rules by which civilized man has been governed in all ages, these legislators established a new code called the rights of man, which might be denominated a sort of institute or digest of anarchy, destructive of every hold of authority, whether religious or civil, on the minds of the people. In allusion to the praise which had been lavished on the French army, Mr. Burke observed, that these soldiers were not an embodied corps under respectable leaders, engaged in resistance to tyranny, but mutineers and deserters, who, having abandoned their officers, and violated their oaths, had leagued themselves with a licentious rabble for the most lawless purposes. After painting in lively colours, but with an accuracy of delineation which could not be questioned, the atrocious outrages committed in France, this penetrating observer of human nature proceeded to vindicate the English revolution from the charge of being the prototype of that heap of confusion to which it had been so preposterously assimilated. "With us," said Mr. Burke, "it was the case of a legal monarch attempting to introduce arbitrary power:—in France it was an arbitrary monarch,

beginning, from whatever cause, to limit his power within the confines of the law. The one was to be resisted, the other was to be managed and directed; but in neither case was the order of the state to be changed, lest government might be ruined, which ought only to be corrected and legalized. With us, we got rid of the man, and preserved the constituent parts of the state: there they got rid of the constituent parts of the state, and kept the man. What we did was in truth and substance, and in a constitutional light;—a revolution not made, but prevented. We took solid securities: we settled doubtful questions: we corrected anomalies in our law. In the staple, fundamental parts of our constitution, we made no revolution; no, nor any alteration at all. We did not impair the monarchy. Perhaps it might be shewn that we strengthened it very considerably. The nation kept the same ranks, the same orders, the same privileges, the same subordinations, the same order in the law, in the revenue, and in the magistracy; the same lords, the same commons, the same corporations, the same electors. The church was not impaired. Her estates, her majesty, her splendour, her orders, and gradations, continued the same. She was preserved in her full efficiency, and cleared only of a certain intolerance, which was her weakness and disgrace. The church and the state were the same after the revolution that they were before, but better secured in every part.”



This luminous speech made a strong impression upon the house ; but it could not shake the confidence of Mr. Fox, who expressed his satisfaction at the downfall of the French government, and defended his opinion that this revolution had its parallel in our own.

Mr. Sheridan on this occasion entered the lists with an ardour equal to that of Burke, of whom he said, "that he could not conceive how it was possible for a person of such principles, or for any man who valued our own constitution, and revered the revolution that obtained it for us, to unite with such feelings an indignant and unqualified abhorrence of all the proceedings of the patriotic party in France." Mr. Sheridan then maintained that the revolution which had taken place in that country was full as just as our's, proceeding upon as sound a principle, and a greater provocation. To support this bold position, he drew a picture of the old French government, and the dilapidated state of the national revenues : from which he inferred the justice of an appeal to the wisdom and feelings of the people, whose only resource for a remedy under the existing evils was in effecting a radical amendment of the frame and fabric of the constitution. The cruelties which disgraced the commencement of the French revolution were ascribed by the orator not to the want of moral principle or of legal restraint, but to "a superior abhorrence of that accursed system



of despotic government, which had so deformed and corrupted human nature, as to make its subjects capable of such acts; a government that set at naught the property, the liberty, and lives of the subjects; a government that dealt in extortion, dungeons, and tortures, setting an example of depravity to the slaves over which it ruled: when therefore the day of power came to the wretched populace, it was not to be wondered at, however much it might be regretted, that they should act without those feelings of justice and humanity of which they had been stripped by the principles and practices of their governors."

This attempt to palliate the violence of the French populace by seeking its sources in a despotism which had subsisted for ages, was equally just with the effort to free the National Assembly from all concern in these lawless proceedings. Of this notable assembly, Mr. Sheridan observed, that so far from being responsible for the outrages which had been committed, it had on the contrary interfered with zeal and alacrity for the maintenance of order and just information; consequently, nothing could warrant the appellation which had been applied to it by Mr. Burke, of being "a bloody, ferocious, and tyrannical democracy. Language like this," he continued, "had been too prevalent in some of the ministerial prints; and he had always seen it with regret; for to traduce the National Assembly, was in his mind to libel the whole French nation.

Whatever was great or good in France, must be looked for there, or nowhere."

Now, unfortunately for the ingenious advocate of this fierce democracy, it was in proof, that so far from using any exertions for the preservation of order, the National Assembly suffered the basest of the Parisian rabble to sit in their hall, and to express by plaudits or hisses the sense which they entertained of the subjects under discussion, and of the conduct of the speakers. Yet the members of this virtuous and independent assembly, while they suffered public clamour to controul the freedom of debate, actually refused to assist the monarch with advice when he condescended to ask it, on the strange plea, that to comply with his request would be derogatory to their own dignity. Such was the notoriety of these facts, and so manifest was the encouragement given to the spirit of sedition by those persons who ought to have invigorated the hands of government, that an encomium on the National Assembly was almost equivalent to an apology for the mob. Mr. Sheridan, however, having undertaken the task, went on to depreciate the character of the reigning sovereign in that distracted country, and to eulogize those men, who, in violation of their private duty as subjects, and the disregard of their official obligations, abandoned the throne which they should have defended, and joined the factions which they ought to have suppressed.

Mr. Burke truly observed in his speech, that "the French had made their way through the destruction of their country to a bad constitution, when they were absolutely in possession of a good one." This position was strangely perverted in the reply of Mr. Sheridan, who, instead of stating it as an assertion that the French stood in no need of manufacturing a new constitution, when they already had one, represented Mr. Burke as saying that "they might have received a good constitution from their monarch." Having thus given a new and invidious version of a plain and self-evident proposition, he proceeded to demand triumphantly "whether this proposed constitution were preparing for the French people in the camp of Marshal Broglio, or they were to search for it in the ruins of the Bastile?"

In public debates, nothing can be more likely than a casual misconception of particular phrases, or an erroneous construction of the speaker's meaning, when the subject is involved in subtilty, and perplexed by the manner of treating it. But this excuse could not apply in the present case, for the language of Burke was too explicit to be mistaken; and the very argument which he supported rendered it impossible that he could fall into the egregious blunder of condemning the French nation for not accepting that from the king which they were competent to settle by their own energies, and the wisdom of their representatives. Nothing could be



plainer than the fact that the French populace were so besotted with the desire of novelty as to look with contempt upon every institution that had the experience of ages for its recommendation.

Instead of building upon the foundations of ancient virtue, and adhering to the approved principles of practical wisdom, the demagogues in that unhappy country humoured the love of change by schemes for the renovation of the state, which were rendered insufficient to the purposes of legislation, by giving to every man the right of judging their propriety, and destroying all the laws of moral and civil obedience. Mr. Burke therefore was perfectly justified in holding up such conduct to general reprobation at a time when the most insidious attempts were making to create a similar spirit of innovation in this country. His opponent, however, neither had the same comprehensive view of the subject, nor an adequate sense of the danger resulting from so pernicious an example, otherwise it is not to be supposed that he would, even in that stage of the revolutionary history, have gone the length of exulting in the absolute extinction of one of the oldest monarchies in Europe, and the substitution of a sanguinary democracy on its ruins.

Mr. Sheridan, indeed, qualified his language by professing his satisfaction at the downfall of despotism in France, which he hoped would never be restored; and this sentiment he avowed, he said, not only as a friend to the general rights of mankind,



but as a politician, speaking only for the advantage of his country."

By despotism, must have been meant the ancient government; which, with all its faults, was infinitely preferable to the despotism of the multitude; both in regard to the conservation of domestic rights, and the security of foreign nations. Now, how far Mr. Sheridan was correct in believing that the republican order of things in France would be purer from corruption in itself, and safer for the neighbouring states, than the polity which it superseded, time has shewn: and though no statesman has the gift of penetrating the veil of futurity, in this instance, at least, a pretty accurate estimate might have been formed of the consequences of the revolution, by a slight examination of ancient and modern history. Yet in opposition to all the rules and lessons for the regulation of conduct, and the calculation of probabilities, which the experience of ages has supplied, this ingenious man ventured the assertion that the revolution was beneficial to our interests, because that "France, by becoming more powerful in her permanent resources, would be a juster, worthier, and more peaceable nation, and more likely to act towards us as we did now towards her." In the same tone of paradoxical confidence, the orator endeavoured to strengthen the opinion which he had advanced on the good effects to be expected from the new order of things, by a very flattering encomium on the

national character of the French, who, he said, "were naturally a brave and generous people: whose only vice had been their government!" After this, it was not much to be wondered that the panegyrist should descend to particulars in complimenting the patriotic leaders of this virtuous people: but an Englishman could hardly have expected to hear that the revolution in his own country consisted in a change of the constitution. Mr. Sheridan, however, observed, in opposition to what had fallen from Mr. Burke on this event, that he had never been accustomed to consider that transaction as merely the removal of one man, and the substitution of another, but as the glorious æra that gave real and efficient freedom to this country, and established, on a permanent basis, those sacred principles of government, and reverence for the rights of men, which, he for one, could not value here, without wishing to see diffused throughout the world.

Such a view of the revolution has certainly the merit of novelty, for it is at direct variance with historic fact, since the people neither shook off their king, nor made any alteration in the constitution. James II. by his conduct, rendered some measures necessary to restrain him from effecting a revolution on his part; but before these could be adopted he abdicated the throne and the kingdom, in consequence of which nothing remained but to supply the vacancy, which

was done by conferring the crown on the heir, and fixing the succession in the protestant line of the same family. It certainly was very true that this great event settled freedom on a permanent basis; but this was done by preserving the constitution in all its forms from a monarch, who, in violation of his solemn engagements, had assumed to himself a power of dispensing with the laws, and thereby preparing the way for a total change in church and state.

When Mr. Sheridan had concluded his comparison of two transactions which were perfectly dissimilar in all their parts, he was replied to by Mr. Burke, who said, "that he most sincerely lamented the inevitable necessity of publicly declaring, that, henceforth, his honourable friend and himself were separated for ever in politics: yet, even in the very moment of separation, he expected that his honourable friend, for so he had been in the habit of calling him, would have treated him with some degree of kindness; or that, if he had not, for the sake of a long and amicable connexion, heard him with partiality, he would at least have done him the justice of representing his arguments fairly. On the contrary, he had, both cruelly and unexpectedly, misrepresented the nature of his remarks. The honourable gentleman had thought proper to charge him with being the advocate of despotism, though in the beginning of his former speech Mr.



Burke maintained he had expressly reprobated every measure which carried with it even the slightest appearance of despotism. All who knew him, could not avoid, without the most unmerited violation of natural justice, acknowledging that he was the professed enemy of despotism in every shape, whether it appeared as the splendid tyranny of Louis XIV. or the outrageous democracy of the present government of France, which levelled all distinctions in society. The honourable gentleman," continued Burke, "had also charged him with having libelled the National Assembly, and stigmatized them as a bloody, cruel, and ferocious democracy." In answer to this, he appealed to the house whether he had uttered a single syllable concerning the National Assembly that could warrant such a construction as the honourable gentleman had put upon his words. He felt himself warranted in positively repelling the imputation; because, he hoped that the whole tenour of his life had proved at least that he was a sincere and firm friend to freedom; and under that description, he was concerned to find that there were persons in this country who entertained theories of government not thoroughly consistent with the safety of the state; and who were perhaps ready to transfer a part of that anarchy which prevailed in France to this kingdom, for the purpose of effecting their own designs. As to the charge of abusing the National Assembly,



it might seem almost sufficient to answer, "What is the National Assembly to us?" But Mr. Burke declared "that he did not libel the National Assembly of France, whom he considered very little in the discussion of these matters; that he thought all the substantial power resided in the republic of Paris, whose authority guided, or whose example was followed by all the republics of France. The republic of Paris had an army under their orders, and not under those of the National Assembly." Having thus stated a very important but certain fact, that Paris led the nation, Mr. Burke proceeded to observe, "that the honourable gentleman had asked from whence the people of France were to expect a better constitution?—Whether from Marshal Broglio, at the head of his army; or were they to look for it amidst the dungeons of the Bastille? Was that a fair and candid mode of treating his argument, or was it what he ought to have expected in the moment of departed friendship? On the contrary, was it not evident that the honourable gentleman had made a sacrifice of his friendship for the sake of catching some momentary popularity? If the fact was such, even greatly as he should still continue to admire the honourable gentleman's talents, he must tell him that his argument was chiefly an argument *ad invidiam*, and that all the applause which he could hope to receive from his clubs was scarcely

worth the sacrifice which he had chosen to make for so insignificant an acquisition."

A public breach between two political characters of such great and deserved celebrity could not but produce a very lively sensation in the public mind, and occasion a variety of reflections on the conduct of each party. It was indeed considered as the prelude to a more extended schism in the ranks of opposition; for the prevention of which, and to effect a reconciliation where it had already taken place, a meeting was held at Burlington House two days after this conflict in the House of Commons. Here a very animated and extraordinary conversation, or, more properly, debate, was carried on between Burke and Sheridan from ten o'clock at night till three in the morning; but though a signal display of talent was evinced on both sides, and their mutual friends made every effort to accomplish a union, the interview ended rather in an aggravation than an adjustment of hostilities. On this occasion much blame was thrown upon Burke, whose implacability was represented as little better than treachery towards those persons with whom he had long been associated on public grounds, as well as in the bonds of private amity. There were not wanting, indeed, some who affected to consider his conduct as the result of a deliberate design to abandon the opposition, and make his peace with government. But these

charges were very unjust; for though the irritability of his temper carried him to an extremity of violence on the subject of this difference, there can be no question made of the sincerity of his opinions. Besides, it should be remembered that the affairs of France were not brought forward by him, but by Mr. Fox, and that too in a manner equally uncalled for and improper. Yet Burke at that time did not enter into any discussion of the subject; and when he ventured upon it in a subsequent debate, it was with a great feeling of personal respect towards Mr. Fox, and the expression of regret at being under the necessity of dissenting from him in this instance. It is true, the political union of these two great statesmen was dissolved by this radical difference of sentiment on the French revolution, but it is no less true that they still cherished a mutual esteem, and occasionally exchanged visits. But the case was otherwise with regard to the rupture between Sheridan and Burke, for it remained incurable, and they never spoke to each other afterwards in private, which led many to suppose that there were some secret causes for this rancour, not connected with French politics. To such a degree was the animosity carried, that they studiously avoided all intercourse at those houses where they had been accustomed to meet; and while at St. Anne's Hill, the name of Mr. Burke continued to be mentioned with respect by Mr. Fox and his friends, Sheridan on these occa-



sions always preserved silence, though in the House of Commons, from motives of policy, he spoke of him, "as one for whose talents and personal virtue he had the highest esteem, veneration, and regard, and with whom he might be allowed to differ in opinion upon the subject of France, persuaded as he was, that they never could differ in principle." Mr. Burke, however, did not condescend to acknowledge the compliment in the house, because he doubted its sincerity; and elsewhere he never heard the name of Sheridan without expressing emotions of resentment amounting to abhorrence. One reason assigned by him for this dislike was a conviction that the separation between him and his party would not have gone to such a length as it did, had it not been for the officiousness of Sheridan, which he ascribed to the design of gaining the ascendancy over himself and Fox in the political hemisphere. Whether the suspicion was chimerical or not, it is certain that Burke did not stand alone in his belief of its truth; for when the division took place, and of course occasioned general observation, much was said on secret intrigues that were alleged to have been carried on during the recent expectancy of a change in the ministry, and which being now publicly discussed, brought upon Sheridan the appellation of Joseph Surface. Various stories were circulated, and of course some allusions to them found their way into the daily prints, very little to the credit of his integrity either



as a private friend or a public character ; and among other things, it was said that the Duke of Portland, who had long headed the party, was completely disgusted with the conduct of Sheridan, both towards Fox in the late business of the regency, and the present contest with Burke on the affairs of France. To repel these insinuations, and to make it evident that he continued in the same degree of estimation with his illustrious associates, Mr. Sheridan, took the opportunity in a debate on the tobacco, duty of observing, that “ those who made the attacks upon him elsewhere, had gone out of the common path ; and instead of pursuing the old sober staple of abuse, had descended to the lowest scurrilities, and fallen without mercy not only upon his public conduct, but also on his private life. They had made charges of a singular nature, and endeavoured to rob him of the esteem and friendship of those whom he valued most in society : fortunately, however, their charges were as void of truth as they were fraught with malice. He had hitherto treated them with contemptuous silence ; and would have continued in this disposition to the present day, if he had not felt some reason to think, which reason he had not heard till a few hours before, that some of those charges were considered as founded in truth. What he more particularly alluded to were whispers or reports of jealousies among some of his dearest friends, and of a certain opposition affirmed to have been

made by a noble duke against some views or expectations which he was said to have entertained. Now, concerning such whispers and reports, he could truly declare, that there was not in them one grain of truth. The opinion which they ascribed to the noble duke had never been entertained by him. On the contrary, Mr. Sheridan remarked that he would not venture to state the opinion which the noble duke was pleased to entertain of him, lest he should be accused of vanity in publishing what he might deem highly flattering. All therefore that he would presume to assert on this occasion was, that if he had it in his power to make the man, whose good opinion he should most highly prize, think favourably of him, he would have that person think of him precisely as the noble duke then did: and then his wish on that subject would be most amply gratified. He added, that “the jealousies to which he was described as having giving occasion existed only in the brains of his traducers, and he was therefore perfectly at his ease whilst they were propagating their calumnies. He defied any man to charge him with a single act which could be tortured into a violation of any engagement founded in honour and integrity. If he could be charged, in truth, with any thing dishonourable, mean, or unmanly, he should feel very differently indeed: his mind, in that case, would sting him more than the most bitter re-

proaches of his most calumniating enemies. As to any pretensions which he might be supposed to set up to situations far beyond his natural weight in the community, he would only observe that it was the peculiar excellence of the British constitution, that a man could push forward into notice and distinction the talents or abilities, whatever they might be, with which he was gifted by Providence."

In the course of this speech, Mr. Fox signified his approbation of what had been advanced by a public appeal to the house; and yet, notwithstanding this boast of union, the subsequent secession from the party of the Duke of Portland, accompanied by some other distinguished members of both houses, afforded a pretty convincing proof that neither were the jealousies ideal, nor the rumour of dissension a mere coinage of malicious invention.

Mr. Sheridan distinguished himself this session by very powerful exertions to procure a repeal of the act passed the year before, subjecting tobacco to the excise laws; on which subject he very happily combined wit and argument; but neither his railery nor his reasoning could carry through the committee a resolution, which would materially have affected an impost from whence the nation derived a clear annual revenue of more than six millions.

Mr. Sheridan was not more successful in his endeavours to shake the credit of the minister on the subject of the general state of the finances, than

he had been in his attempts to procure the repeal of the law respecting tobacco. When Mr. Pitt congratulated the house on the improved state of the country in the extension of its commerce and the increase of its resources, Mr. Sheridan laboured with considerable ingenuity to support the calculations which he had adduced on former occasions, to shew that in reality the national income did not cover the expenditure. He continued still to maintain the same position which he had repeatedly advanced, that the balance against the country amounted to a million at least every year; and for the purpose of proving the assertion, he now had recourse to the sums that would be requisite for the completion of Somerset House and Carleton House, which he was led to do, because these articles were not included in the ministerial estimate. Mr. Sheridan, however, was much more happy in his animadversions on the lottery, as a measure of finance, than in his arithmetical investigations of the public accounts. With respect to this branch of the revenue, he contended that the ultimate and permanent loss to the community, in the injury done to the industry and integrity of the lower classes of the people, infinitely outweighed any temporary advantage which the minister could derive from it. He opposed it, therefore, on the same principle that he did the extension of the excise, because it was part of a system which contemplated a momentary gain at the expense of



those sound and superior principles which formed the true foundation of our prosperity. He looked not to the Exchequer for the produce of a lottery, but to the Old Bailey; not to the temporary advantage arising in a pecuniary point of view, but to the exports to Botany Bay. Recurring to the same subject, at the close of his speech, he said, that "with regard to lotteries, he perhaps had greater opportunities of knowing their bad consequences than most gentlemen: and he was persuaded that if these consequences were as well understood by the committee in general, there could be but one opinion on the subject. Having brought in a plan for the regulation of the police of Westminster, he had come at facts which proved that lotteries were most fatal in their effects." Mr. Sheridan then proceeded to explain this declaration, by stating that a plan for regulating the police of Westminster had been framed by an eminent barrister, and brought forward from Lord Sydney's office; that he had cordially assisted in making it, and given every help in his power, though it was not to be known that he did so, nor was he to derive any credit from it; that in the prosecution of this work he had necessarily many conferences with the Westminster justices, and they produced to him a pawnbroker, who said that he never had such a number of things brought to him in the course of the whole year as during the time of drawing the lottery. That first the men brought

their working tools, then the women their clothes, and one article after another, till at length they pawned even the very clasps of their childrens' shoes; and at last, such a picture of penury, distress, and despair was exhibited, as must make every man possessed of the least feeling shudder. That picture justified him, therefore, in asserting that let the profit acquired from the lottery be ever so great, he should object to it, as the base gain derived from a vile and pernicious plan of playing upon the worst passions of the poor and laborious ranks of society.

But forcible as this representation of the evils attending a national system of legalized gambling unquestionably was, and irrefutable as were the arguments alleged against it, both in a moral and political point of view, still, as bearing upon the subject under consideration, it must be admitted that neither did the one invalidate the correctness of the statements of the minister, nor the other support the calculation of his opponent. As a matter of conscientious feeling, and of liberal policy, the objection raised against the lottery was irresistible; but in the present case, it was evidently brought forward to supply the want of direct conclusions subversive of the financial credit of the minister. Mr. Pitt, therefore, while he treated the observations which had fallen from Mr. Fox in the course of the debate with courteousness, censured those of Mr. Sheridan as petulant and fallacious, not

only founded in error, but open to the charge of wilful misrepresentation.

To this keen reproach the orator replied, in a good-humoured strain, that if he could judge from the manner of the right honourable gentleman, he appeared to have reserved the mildness of a peace establishment for Mr. Fox, and had hoarded up the hostile spirit for himself. The minister might as well, however, have shewn that

“Grim visag’d war hath smooth’d his wrinkled front,”

because he must well know, that when he felt himself on right grounds, this spirit was not apt to weigh much with him. He declared, besides, that he should have answered with equal hostility, had not some time elapsed, and his feeling of resentment subsided.

At the close of this session, Mr. Sheridan aimed a blow against the credit of the East India Company, by moving the payment of three hundred thousand pounds, which, in 1783, the Bank of England had advanced to the company on the collateral security of exchequer bills issued by government.

The motive for bringing forward this proposition was obviously to invalidate what had been stated of the prosperous condition of our eastern concerns, or at least to depreciate the merits of administration in regard to any improved policy and increased revenue that might have taken place in British India. As the luminous report brought up by

Mr. Dundas on this subject tended to throw a strong reflection on the famous bill of Mr. Fox, and also upon the justice of the protracted impeachment of the governor-general, the wisdom of whose measures was thus indirectly admitted, it seemed expedient to the party that something should be done to weaken the effect of the statement, and if possible to throw a doubt upon the solvency of the company. This task was committed to Mr. Sheridan, who managed it with sufficient dexterity; but though he made some long speeches on the question, he failed in carrying his motion: soon after which the session closed, and parliament was dissolved.



## CHAPTER XIX.

*Re-election of Mr. Sheridan for Stafford.—His Exertions in Favour of Mr. Fox for Westminster.—Ridicule cast upon him by Horne Tooke.—Meeting of Parliament.—Compliment paid to the Minister relating to the Expense of the Armament against Spain.—Opposition to the Malt Tax.—War between Russia and the Porte.—Mr. Sheridan's Speech on that Subject.—Farther Contentions in Parliament on the French Revolution.—Debates on the Finances.—Motion for postponing the Prorogation of Parliament.*

PARLIAMENT having been dissolved by proclamation on the eleventh of June, Mr. Sheridan, and his colleague, the honourable Edward Monckton, lost no time in repairing to Stafford, where they experienced a very friendly reception, and were re-chosen without delay or difficulty. In Westminster, however, an opposition arose, which, though not of any serious import, was of a very peculiar character, and excited considerable attention. Mr. Horne Tooke, who had played a variety of parts before the public, now offered himself as a candidate to represent that city upon independent principles. This was a contest as mortifying as it was unexpected, because it evidently appeared to arise from personal hostility to the popular candidate, on the very grounds which he himself laid his claim to public favour.

The address of Mr. Tooke to the electors put this beyond all doubt; for after observing that their two late representatives had never concurred in any measure for the public benefit, the author made an allusion too strong to be mistaken, in saying, that “throughout history, down to the present moment, all personal parties and factions have always been found dangerous to the liberties of every free people; but **THEIR COALITIONS**, unless resisted and punished by the public, certainly fatal.”

On this occasion Mr. Sheridan took a very active part in canvassing the city for his friend: and though there was not any room to doubt of the ultimate success of Mr. Fox, yet, as it was desirable that he should stand at the head of the list on the final return, the utmost exertions were made to obtain for him that distinction.

No man was better fitted for such a business than Mr. Sheridan, whose ready humour, persuasive address, and convivial manners, gave him many powerful advantages, and enabled him to gain an influence over minds that were little inclined to favour his politics, or to support his party. In the former contest for Westminster he displayed his zeal and abilities, on the behalf of Mr. Fox, with great effect; and, in the present, he acted with similar energy and ability both in the committee and on the hustings. But it was remarked, that, though Sheridan was always at the

side of his friend when the state of the poll called for an harangue to the surrounding populace, he seemed to shrink from the rough sarcasms and unceremonious language of Horne Tooke. The eloquence of Fox, and the wit of his ingeniously, could not erase the impressions produced upon the motley assemblies who daily attended to witness the progress of the election, and to hear the speeches of the orators. The coarse virulence of Tooke, which neither spared rank nor talent, public principles nor private conduct, was extremely well calculated to operate upon the passions of the multitude, who applauded loudest that wit which approached the nearest to scurrility. With such an antagonist, even the genius of Sheridan was ill qualified to contend; and though he sometimes succeeded in amusing the crowd by his sallies of pleasantry, the laugh was generally turned against him by the cutting personalities and ludicrous representations of one whose extensive acquaintance with public men enabled him to expose their failings to contempt and ridicule. In broad humour, and quickness of application, Tooke was equal, if not superior to Sheridan, of which many instances occurred during this election; but on one occasion it burst forth with such an electrifying effect as to produce reiterated plaudits. Mr. Fox having retired from the hustings at the close of the poll, left the charge of entertaining the spectators to his auxiliary, of which

circumstance an immediate advantage was taken by Horne Tooke, who said that it was always the rule, when the quack doctor withdrew from the stage, to leave his merry-andrew behind him.

The cause of this enmity to Mr. Fox it is difficult to conjecture; but for the splenetic attacks upon Mr. Sheridan we are not so much at a loss, since the latter, having a few months before had occasion to notice a letter published by Tooke on the supposed marriage of the Prince of Wales, observed: "it is true, a pamphlet has been written by an ingenious gentleman, the madness and folly of which are apparent in every page, and the whole drift of it betrays the author to be a bad citizen; because, when he roundly asserts that he seriously believes the fact to which he refers to have taken place, and yet resorts to no means of elucidating it, he insinuates what he ought not to have insinuated, without proceeding to establish it, by something at least that bore a resemblance to truth."

This was a direct impeachment of the moral integrity of Tooke, and charging him with circulating an evil report, from that spirit of wanton malignity which is totally careless about the verity of what it relates, or the consequences which the calumny may produce.

Tooke was conscious enough that the censure was merited, but he never forgave the quarter from whence it came; and, therefore, when he had an opportunity of retaliating, he did it with the ven-



geance of an Indian, who estimates his triumph not by the justice of his cause, but by the number of his scalps.

The first subject that engaged the consideration of the new parliament was the recent difference between England and Spain, with regard to the right of forming settlements on the north-west coast of America. Some private adventurers, under the protection of the India Company, having engaged in the fur trade for the Chinese market, established themselves at Nootka Sound, with the consent of the native chiefs, but were driven from thence by a Spanish officer, under special orders from his court. When the particulars of this violence became known to the British cabinet, no time was lost in demanding reparation for the injury which we had sustained, and an acknowledgment of the rights which had been so shamefully violated. After some equivocation and delay on the part of the court of Madrid, during which the most active preparations were carried on to enforce our claim to satisfaction, the articles insisted upon by our ambassador were fully complied with in the restitution of property, and an admission of the right of trade and fishing on the north-west coast of America. But though the termination of this dispute gave great and general satisfaction to the nation, some members of the opposition affected to consider the arrangements that had been made as insufficient, and replete

with improper concessions on the part of England, instead of those acquisitions which we had a right to expect from the court of Spain, after the insult that had been committed upon our flag. If Mr. Fox was not exactly of this opinion, at least he objected to the address of congratulation, on the ground that we had submitted to restraints and limitations that were inconsistent with the rights and privileges which had been set up in justification of the armament. Mr. Sheridan did not take any part in the debate; but when the minister laid before the house an account of the expenses incurred by the preparations of a war with Spain, and proposed a plan for paying off the whole by the balance of the issues of unclaimed dividends, and the imposition of some temporary taxes, he delivered his sentiments with great candour, and highly complimented Mr. Pitt on the general outline of his plan for the extinction of the three millions necessary to discharge the expense incurred. He assured the right honourable gentleman that he had done no more than justice to that side of the house in thinking they would give their support to such a necessary measure. Whatever difference of opinion there might be on particular topics; whether some of them might think on the subject of that armament, either that it was not necessary, and that there had been no reason to have talked to Spain in so haughty and menacing a tone; whether other gentlemen might

deem the armament necessary, and the satisfaction obtained inadequate; or whether others, again, might consider the conduct of the right honourable gentleman as spirited and proper, and that the convention concluded between the two countries was excellent, and likely to prove of permanent advantage:—let the contrarieties of opinion be what they might, the right honourable gentleman, he was persuaded, would find but one sentiment in the house on the subject of his proposed plan. And as those who sat near him had often stated that nothing was so necessary as to meet the exigency of the moment in a firm, manly way, to look our difficulties at all times in the face, to bring them forward without disguise, and call upon the house to provide for them to their full extent; now, as the advice was taken, they would cheerfully assist in sharing the disagreeable task of imposing fresh burthens on the people, convinced as they were, that however the mode of incurring the expense might be wrong, that the expense, being once incurred, must be paid.

But though Mr. Sheridan bestowed his share of praise on the plan proposed for liquidating the expense of the armament, he took an exception to that part of it which respected the appropriation of the unclaimed dividends, because he feared that the meddling with any money issued to pay the public creditor would affect the national credit.

This objection appeared so very reasonable to

Mr. Pitt, that he made an alteration in his scheme; and instead of resorting to the unclaimed dividends, he consented to borrow a loan of half a million from the Bank, as long as a floating balance to that amount should remain in the hands of the cashier.

After having given his approbation to the plan of the minister, and admitted the indispensable necessity of carrying it into effect by new taxes, it was little to be expected that Mr. Sheridan would, on the following day, make a stand against the very measure which he had so openly sanctioned. This, however, was the case; for when Mr. Pitt proposed to lay for a time an additional duty on malt, as one of the means to be adopted for clearing off the extraordinary expenditure that had been incurred by the armament, he was strenuously opposed by several members, and Mr. Sheridan among the rest, who contended that it would press hard upon the poorer order of the people.

On this occasion, he remarked, that however trivial the intended addition might prove, it must always be granted that a number of trifling augmentations aggregately swelled to a gross increase, and an intolerable oppression. They had gone so far already, that another small matter of addition would turn the scale; and therefore the attempt to make any addition ought to be resisted. With regard to the duration of the act, he repeated an assertion which he had before advanced, "that the right honourable gentleman de-



ceived himself in imagining that the taxes would be only temporary; for when once passed, they would become permanent. The right honourable gentleman would find that he could not do without them. The subject, of course, was one which ought to be treated with great gravity, and most deliberate attention. If the new taxes actually turned out more productive than was expected, they could tell, from experience, what would be the conduct of the right honourable gentleman; for what he had done already, there was reason to expect he might do again—make a most dangerous use of the surplus, and be guilty of the most blameable appropriation of it, by expending the money in effecting the purposes of a dissolution of parliament, or by increasing our peace establishments.”

After this philippic against the minister, which but ill comported with the eulogium previously passed upon his conduct, Mr. Sheridan laboured to prove that the malt tax was already unproductive; from whence he glided into his old doctrine, that the expenditure of the country exceeded the income to the annual amount of a million and upwards. This opposition to the new impost was continued through every stage; and when Mr. Coke proposed a tax upon dogs as a substitute for it, Mr. Sheridan raised an objection to that likewise, by observing that he was convinced such a tax was not practicable; though a few years afterwards this

very measure was adopted with effect. It is remarkable also, that notwithstanding the strong argument against the new tax upon malt, drawn from the consideration of its oppressive hardship upon domestic comforts, yet at a subsequent period, when Mr. Sheridan and his friends were in power, a measure, proposing the extension of the excise to private brewing, met with their decided support.

The dispute with Spain was scarcely brought to an amicable conclusion, before a cloud arose in the north, alarming the nation with the prospect of a storm, far more extensive in its operation, and serious in its effects. The insatiable ambition of the Empress Catherine had long excited the jealousy of the different European powers; but at this time the nature of her views was developed too clearly to be misunderstood. Nothing could be plainer than her design of destroying the Ottoman state, and of securing that object by annexing Poland to her vast dominions. She had, indeed, expressly avowed an intention of placing her grandson, Constantine, on the throne of the eastern empire, in the antient Byzantium; and to carry that point into execution, she directed her force with such energy and success on the Euxine as to gain possession of the strong fortress of Oczakow, which might be considered the key of the Turkish capital. To repress the farther aggrandizement of Russia, the courts of London and Berlin co-operated for the restoration of peace be-

tween the two great belligerent powers ; but their interference was treated with insufferable contempt by the haughty Catherine, who plainly declared that no nation upon earth should meddle with her concerns. On this occasion she marked her resentment against England in particular, by refusing to renew the treaty of commerce, the term of which had just expired ; while, at the same time, she entered into another with France, on the most favourable conditions to that country. All this, however, would not have furnished an adequate reason for hostile preparations on our side, had not the general interests of Europe been affected by the encroachments of the northern Semiramis, and our commercial relations in the Levant been menaced, as well as our eastern possessions endangered by her progress in the Turkish dominions. It required no peculiar sagacity to discover that the acquisition of Constantinople, by a maritime power like Russia, must speedily be followed by the conquest of Egypt ; and thus, besides the entire command of the Mediterranean shores, the way would have been completely opened for the subjugation of Persia, and the eventual expulsion of the English from every part of India. These were no chimerical apprehensions ; and he would have ill deserved the character of an enlightened statesman who should have beheld the establishment of the Russian authority on the Bosphorus with indifference. The

British minister was well acquainted with the gigantic spirit of the empress; and he also knew that the means which she enjoyed of effecting her objects upon Turkey and Poland were commensurate to her ambitious views, which could only be checked by a timely interposition, to save those comparatively feeble states from her grasp. But the people at large could not enter into the policy of such a contest, which was, besides, rendered unpopular by the general dislike, amounting to national antipathy, against the Mussulmans and their government. Notwithstanding the difficulties with which the measure was surrounded, Mr. Pitt persevered in endeavouring to rescue from destruction a power, which, whatever might be its inherent weakness and defects, was of great importance to our commercial interests, and necessary to the preservation of the balance of power. On the failure, therefore, of the efforts for mediation, and when the direct scheme of the autocratrix could no longer be a matter of doubt, a message was communicated to parliament on the twenty-eighth of March, 1791, stating, that His Majesty's endeavours, in conjunction with his allies, to effect a pacification between Russia and the Porte, had been unsuccessful; and that, as consequences might arise by the farther progress of the war of great importance to England, and Europe in general, His Majesty had found it requisite to make an augmentation of his naval force,



relying on the wisdom of parliament to defray the expense of the same.

This message was taken into consideration the day following; when an address, proposed by Mr. Pitt, was carried by a majority of only ninety-three, which encouraged the opposition to renew the subject; and accordingly, on the twelfth of April, Mr. Grey moved eight resolutions, declarative of certain general principles, with regard to the interest of this country in the preservation of peace, the just causes, and the unjust pretexts for war; all of which were applied by him to the hostilities between Russia and the Porte: from whence an inference was drawn, in the form of a resolution, "that the expense of an armament must be burthensome to the country, and that, under the present circumstances, it was inexpedient and unnecessary."

Among other propositions advanced in support of this motion, one of the most fallacious was that which reduced all lawful war to the simple abstract principle of personal self-defence; and concluding from thence, that, because neither England, nor any of her allies, were directly attacked by Russia, their interference was unjust. The honourable mover, however, was not contented with this mode of reasoning, the tendency of which went to dissolve all the ties that hold the family of nations together, but he proceeded to the extravagant length of maintaining that, should the czarina

accomplish all the objects of ambition imputed to her counsels, in the possession of Constantinople, and the expulsion of the Turks from their dominions, the rest of Europe, instead of being injured, would be gainers by the change.

As the negotiations were still pending, ministers could not with propriety enter upon such explanations as would have fully warranted their proceedings, and even have justified more active exertions against Russia. This silence proved of considerable advantage to their opponents; and they did not fail to make a powerful use of it, in persuading many to vote with them, who, had they known the intrigues which were then carrying on by the party here, and the vast designs of Russia, would have given an unqualified support to the government. Some independent members of the House of Commons, however, defended the armament with considerable ability, particularly the late Sir William Young, and the present Earl Grosvenor, who took a comprehensive view of the question, and pointed out, with geographical precision, the immediate and remote consequences of that aggrandizement, which, by every motive of sound policy, we were called upon to restrain.

At the close of the debate Mr. Sheridan made a long, erratic, and facetious speech, in which he treated what he termed ironically the magnificent silence of ministers as disrespectful to the house; and so far from being willing to give the Chan-

cellor of the Exchequer any degree of confidence, he pledged himself ready to go through his whole political life, and prove that most of his measures had been pregnant with mischief. The historical and geographical knowledge of the baronet, who preceded him, he turned into ridicule, by saying that he had traversed over all Europe; traced the history of the navigation and commerce of Russia from the earliest period; described her frontiers, and all parts of her dominions; expatiating with as much familiarity concerning the Dnieper and the Danube, as if he had been talking of the Worcestershire canal; and that he had, besides, pictured the empress as a female Colossus, standing with one foot on the banks of the Black Sea, and the other on the coast of the Baltic. "But," said Mr. Sheridan, "are maxims, drawn from maps and books, the cause for which an English House of Commons are to plunge their country into a war, and waste the blood and treasure of their constituents?" With equal pleasantry, but certainly with as little real argument, he turned into banter what had fallen from Lord Belgrave, whose readiness at classical quotation rarely failed to furnish some opportunity for the wit of his lively antagonist. On the present occasion, he observed, that "the noble lord, who had formerly shewn himself very much attached to the ancient Greeks, had appeared not to be so much attached to the modern Greeks,

and had said, 'See, what a faithless set of people these modern Greeks are.' In what," said Mr. Sheridan, "did their treachery consist? He knew of no such treachery; and he owned that he should rather have expected that the noble lord, with a classical indignation, would have lamented that the descendants of Demosthenes should not be orators, statesmen, and soldiers, but an unfortunate race, kept only to pamper the false taste and degraded appetites of the Ottoman court. So much out of humour had the noble lord proved himself to be with the modern Greeks, that he had been betrayed into a perfidy of citation, having quoted a Latin line, to his surprise, when he had expected a line of Homer at least."

On the immediate subject of what the orator termed our arrogant interference between Russia and the Porte, little, if any thing, was added that could deserve attention; and the only light thrown upon it in the way of reasoning was in the supposition of extreme cases, which no man else perhaps would ever have thought had the slightest analogy to a conflict that involved the very existence of one great empire, and the immeasurable increase of another. "Suppose," said Mr. Sheridan, "when we were making the peace in 1783, Russia had insisted on our giving up Negapatam in the East Indies to the Dutch; extravagant as this might appear, it was not more so than our insisting on her restoring Oczakow to the



Porte. Imagine then that she had made a point of our resigning Negapatam to the Dutch, meaning, on her part, to give it to Denmark, or some other of her allies. What should we have said to such demand? The answer would have been, what has Russia to do with our possessions in the East Indies? We should have repelled the demand, and treated it with contempt. Suppose, in that case, the empress had sent a fleet down the channel, and burnt Hull in its way to London, where, on her arrival, she was determined to enforce her negociations, by acting as an armed mediator: should not we have thought that Russia acted most arrogantly, and most unwarrantably? and yet, her conduct in that case would not be more extraordinary than our's in the present instance." Mr. Sheridan added, that " he shrewdly suspected we were led on by our allies; and that the real cause of the war was a Prussian object in Poland. Suppose, however, that we went on with the contest, and that in the end the emperor should obtain what he wanted in Moldavia and Wallachia; the empress what she wanted in Turkey; and Prussia should gain Thorn and Dantzic: in that case, he had no hesitation in predicting that the lot of England would be to pay the piper; and, that the expense we might incur would be all that fell to our share." After running on in this course of hypothetical declamation for some time, Mr. Sheridan descended to personal invective.

tive against the minister, whom he charged with ignorance, presumption, and restless ambition, in setting himself up as the great posture-master of the balance of power, as possessing an exclusive right to the umpire of all, and to weigh out, in patent scales of his own, the quantity of dominion that each power should possess. This desultory speech terminated in another eulogium upon the French revolution, upon which the orator declared that his opinion remained fixed, and would continue the same. But, as if it was not sufficient to maintain the immutability of his sentiments, on a fluctuating subject, he finished by observing, “that what had happened in France afforded a useful lesson to us, and that it was our duty to improve by that event.”

Nothing could be more easy than to have exposed the absurdity of placing the colonial acquisitions of England upon a footing with the integral possessions of Turkey; but when Mr. Pitt was wantonly abused for his exertions in preserving that balance of power on which the peace of Europe so materially depended, the finest compliment was in reality paid to his judgment as a statesman, and the fullest answer given to all the objections that had previously been urged against his conduct towards Russia. The principal stress of the party, however, was laid upon the silence observed by government, with regard to the secret information which furnished sufficient grounds for

the confederacy between England and other states to controul the rapacity of Catherine; but it ill became Mr. Fox to accuse his great rival of withholding such communications, when he must have been conscious at the time that he was himself acting the part of duplicity.

The most extraordinary part of this business was the fact, that while the British cabinet was endeavouring, in conjunction with other states, to erect a mound for the preservation of commerce, and political independence, Mr. Fox was labouring with an underhand contrivance to let the torrent of ambition loose, regardless of its direction, and indifferent to the consequences.

Whatever difference of opinion there might be on the subject of the general policy of Mr. Pitt, it could not be denied that in this instance he had the merit of upholding the weak against the powerful, and of using his efforts to preserve the pact, by which the peace of nations is best secured. Mr. Fox, on the contrary, exhibited another spirit, when he sent a secret agent to Petersburg for the express purpose of counteracting the negotiations of our minister at that court, and of encouraging the empress in her designs, by promising her the support of the opposition in this country. This singular transaction, to which it is to be hoped no parallel will in future be supplied, has become matter of history; and the mission of Mr. Robert Adair will ever stand as a monument of political

integrity, and a memorable instance of the patriotism of party. The ambassador of the opposition was received, as might be expected, with distinguished honours: he was seated at the right hand of the empress, and loaded with magnificent presents, far surpassing those bestowed upon the representative of his sovereign; while, to crown all, the bust of the man of the people was placed in the imperial cabinet. Whether Mr. Fox consulted with his friends on this occasion, or whether he acted solely by his own judgment, is a point of very little moment; since in either case the circumstance stands as an indelible stain upon his character; and it is very observable that none of his biographers and eulogists, though they have boasted of his success in counteracting the measures of the minister in this instance, have ventured to relate the story of the unconstitutional and illegal embassy by which that object was accomplished.

That the opposition at this time entertained expectations of getting into power, and that this was the direct aim of Mr. Fox in sending his relation to Russia, may be inferred not only from the history of the transaction, but the remarkable language of Mr. Sheridan, in saying that he would not place confidence in government, unless the first official department were rescued from the hands of a person, who, to an overcharged conceit of his own abilities, added the rashness which always must attend inexperience, and that situ-



ation filled by a man familiar with foreign courts, and possessed of dexterity and simplicity sufficient to enable him to discharge the duties of the office with skill and success. By dexterity, he did not mean that cunning which another person mistook for craft, and that craft for wisdom; but he meant dexterity to discover and ward off the devices and intrigues of foreign ministers; and simplicity to follow the strait-forward path of open manliness and plain-dealing himself. Mr. Sheridan said "that he would leave the house to make the application of this contrast; but unless a department of so much importance, considering the present situation of foreign courts, were placed in such hands, it was impossible for him to give confidence to ministers; nor had they, in fact, any right to expect it from him, who had uniformly resisted the right honourable gentleman's measures." These two portraits, from the peculiarity of the drawing, the attributes with which they were surrounded, and the lights in which they were placed, could no more be mistaken than the intent of the exhibition, which was manifestly to excite a general idea of the absolute necessity of an immediate change in administration. It is true, the armament against Russia was rendered unpopular by misrepresentation; and the majorities in parliament were thereby considerably reduced; which, together with the improper conduct of Mr. Fox, in presuming to negotiate for his party with a foreign potentate,

compelled the minister to relinquish his plan, and gave a complete triumph to the empress, who thus secured her footing in the Crimea, and prepared the way for the total subjugation of Poland. After this, it may be safely left to posterity to judge how far the opposition, or their leader, deserved the praise of open manliness, simplicity, and plain dealing; or with what justice the minister could be accused of rashness, cunning, and inexperience. But though the party so far succeeded as to embarrass the enlarged views of the government, they failed in accomplishing their direct aim of driving Mr. Pitt from the helm of the state.

This disappointment served to increase their spleen, which appeared in the renewal of the subject from time to time, and even when the occasion had totally subsided by the termination of hostilities between Russia and the Porte. In all this, one looks in vain for that disinterested patriotism and liberal principle to which the opposition made such large pretensions; nor did their deportment respecting the affairs of France tend in the smallest degree to confirm their claim to these public virtues. That political wisdom, which has for its object the general good, unmixed with private passion, is of a sedate, deliberative character, and examines opinions and events, not only in the causes whence they spring, but the consequences to which they lead, before it comes to any conclusion upon their merits. This was not exemplified in

the behaviour of Mr. Fox, and those of his friends, who persevered with him in eulogizing a revolution, the features of which every day presented some new and frightful changes, disgraceful to the country where they occurred, and portentous of mischief to the surrounding nations. I know not whether the plea of insincerity would not be the best apology that could be offered for the distinguished persons among ourselves who contributed in some measure to the anarchy of France, by availing themselves of their senatorial privilege in bestowing unqualified praises upon the agents of the storm. In such a case, some kind of pretext might be alleged for this conduct in the accustomed tactics of parliamentary warfare, by virtue of which every qualified polemic assumes the right of calling to his aid the most heterogeneous arguments, and irregular auxiliaries for the purpose of obtaining a momentary advantage, and of distressing his political adversary. But if this constituted any part of the system of Mr. Fox, the only effect it had was that of strengthening the power of ministers, and of weakening his own party. Yet, regardless of the secession which had already taken place, and of the symptoms of a more extended defection, the head of the opposition missed no opportunity of celebrating the French revolution as an event pregnant with benefits to the human race, and no less deserving of imitation than of praise.

Thus, when a bill was brought into the House of

Commons during this session, the intent of which was to provide a permanent form of government for the colony of Canada, though the plan was of local application, and congenial to the constitution of the parent state, Mr. Fox, in the last stage of it, raised a number of objections to the measure, because it deviated from republican simplicity, and was not assimilated to the new order of things in the United States of America. This sudden and totally unexpected resistance to a concern of no material interest in itself excited general surprise, and produced much alarm among the members of the opposition, many of whom deprecated the discussion of a subject which they were aware would unavoidably lead to the consideration of abstract questions upon the essence of moral and political rights, with a comparative view of the merits of particular schemes of government.

No man could be so short-sighted as to avoid discerning the real aim of Mr. Fox, who made it, indeed, sufficiently apparent, by directing his artillery against every part of the Canadian system of legislation which bore the nearest analogy to the national polity. This conduct, to say the least of it, was excessively imprudent, since whatever reason there might be to think favourably of those persons who began the work of revolution in France, it was an egregious absurdity to set up their principles and example as worthy of being adopted and acted upon in other states. The impolicy indeed



was so evident, that active exertions were made to prevent the farther agitation of questions, which, though certain of raising a tempestuous debate, it was clear would not, from the fermented temper of the times, produce conviction on either side. With a view, therefore, to deliberate reflection, and perhaps to ascertain the balance of opinions among the different persons of greatest influence in the political circle, Mr. Sheridan moved, on the twenty-first of April, that the farther consideration of the bill should be postponed till after the Easter holidays. This proposition was acceded to; but it had neither the effect of closing the breach which had already been made, nor of stopping the progress of discord in the ranks of the party. In the renewal of the debate on the Canadian bill at the beginning of May, Mr. Burke came forward, as he had pledged himself, armed with all the powers of reasoning, facts, and eloquence, to combat the visionary and destructive theories which issued, like the evils of Pandora's box, out of the French declaration of the rights of man. The fruits of this system might be seen, he observed, in the West Indies, where it had set the blacks against the whites, and the whites against the blacks, all actuated alike in their murderous hostility by the stimulating principle of liberty and equality. Having thus shown the practical consequences of the revolutionary doctrines in foreign settlements, Mr. Burke returned to take a survey

of the nation where they originated, and from whose affiliated societies they were kindly distributed among their neighbours. But when he had advanced thus far, and was about to describe the shocking scenes which had recently occurred in France, a fierce uproar arose among his old colleagues, who literally deafened the assembly by their clamour for order, and exhibited a striking specimen of revolutionary candour, while they were accusing another of the want of liberality. In this confusion, Sheridan called upon the minister for an explicit declaration of his sentiments; but Mr. Pitt, though he complimented Mr. Burke on the purity of his motives, and the constitutional excellence of his principles, very judiciously declined delivering any other opinion upon the French revolution, than expressing a wish that the subject had never been mentioned. On the point of order, indeed, he supported Burke; and it would have been very unjust if he had not, for nothing could be more preposterous than to impose silence upon one member for entering into the practical effects of doctrines which another had very irregularly introduced with the most pompous encomiums.

In this extraordinary contest, which brought the full powers of the two greatest orators of the party into collision, Mr. Fox was so greatly affected as to be almost incapable of utterance; and a few days afterwards he endeavoured to soften down much

of what he had said in the warmth of debate, by entering into an explanation of his former language, and justifying himself from the suspicion of republicanism. But it would have been better if this great man had acted with so much caution as to have rendered the vindication altogether unnecessary; for at this time, some of his most intimate and valued acquaintance were certainly dissatisfied with the countenance which the advocates of democracy received from his public speeches. In Sheridan he found a steady adherent, who never failed to echo his opinions with volubility, and to defend them with ardour on all occasions. Mr. Fox had also the satisfaction of being held up as the champion of liberty by the political associations which were then multiplying throughout the kingdom, and of being quoted as an oracle every where for those principles which tended to simplify government, and to increase the power of the people. It may, however, be questioned whether the wit of his pleasant associate, or the measure of his popularity, proved in his estimation an adequate succedaneum for the loss of that immense storehouse of knowledge, and felicity of conversation, which rendered the company and discourse of Burke always delightful to every circle, and which had even commanded the admiration of Johnson. That during these parliamentary conflicts, the zeal of this wonderful man transported him into an intemperate heat of expression

cannot be denied; but at the same time it must be admitted, that the openness of his behaviour, and the effervescence of his language, afforded a convincing proof of that sincerity of heart which has been most illiberally and even wickedly called in question.

The public principle of Burke was displayed at a most critical epoch, and under circumstances in which he was sensible that popularity would not be the reward of his conduct. But he saw the magnitude of the evil, and he traced its ramifications through all the subtle refinements and alluring pretences, which, under the name of reform and improvement, threatened the annihilation of ancient establishments, and the introduction of universal anarchy. Impressed with a deep sense of the danger, he warned his country against the pernicious doctrines which were sure to produce it; and with this patriotic view, he addressed the two great rivals for power, and exhorted them, that whether they should for the future move in the political hemisphere as two flaming meteors, or walk together, like brethren hand-in-hand, to preserve and cherish the British constitution, to guard it against innovation, and to save it from the pestilential influence of French philosophy.

At the conclusion of the same speech, Mr. Burke made a beautiful appeal to the judgment of his hearers, on the danger of hazarding new theories, where human wisdom is contracted, and cannot



foresee the consequences of its rashness. "To the deity," said he, "must be left the province of infinite perfection, who hurls a comet like a projectile, out of its course, and enables it to endure the solar heat, and the pitchy darkness of the chilly night; while to us poor, weak, and incapable mortals, there is no rule of conduct so safe as experience."

The remainder of the session was chiefly occupied in debates on the financial state of the country, and the report of the committee which had been formed to inquire into that subject. Mr. Sheridan admitted that the report was stated with no less candour than accuracy, and that there had been an increase of income within the preceding year. Still he contended that ministers had gone on in adding with prodigality to the public burthens, and that they had violated the promise made by them in the report of finance five years before. Instead of fulfilling the pledge given in 1786, he maintained that a permanent increase of half a million a-year had been added to the national expenditure.

On the part of ministers, this statement was contradicted; and it appeared that so far from any such assurance having been made, the only circumstance on which the assertion rested, was the hypothetical declaration amounting to an assumption, that in case the expenditure should from accidental occurrences increase, the income of the

country would proportionally increase, so that the public receipt would at all times cover the public expenditure. With regard also to the increase of half a million, which had been so ingeniously represented as a permanent addition, it was clearly shewn that the whole consisted of incidental expenses, which would end with the temporary occasions that rendered them necessary. Mr. Sheridan, however, though unable to controvert these positions, persevered in questioning the integrity of the public accounts, and in vindicating the accuracy of his own calculations: with which view he moved no less than forty resolutions, grounded on the financial reports, tending to prove that the revenue did not cover the expenditure; and that in reality no reduction in the national debt had taken place. But though these propositions were introduced in a very able and elaborate speech, they were either all directly negatived, or so met by amendments as to be rendered absolutely nugatory: while an opposite set of resolutions received the approbation of the house, and constituted the triumph of the minister.

These discussions having brought the extraordinaryes voted for the completion of Carleton House into notice, Mr. Sheridan moved for an inquiry into that subject, with the intention of silencing some unpleasant rumours which were then in circulation respecting the misapplication of the money granted by parliament to that use. In the

course of this investigation it appeared that the sums necessary to finish the works, according to the estimates, had been paid into the hands of the Prince's treasurer, which proceeding was censured by the mover of the inquiry, and also by Mr. Fox, in very strong language, amounting to an insinuation that it was done to ensnare the servants of the Prince, or at least to make the world believe that an improper use had been made of the parliamentary grant. Mr. Sheridan contended, that as the house belonged to the king, the whole of the business should have been placed under the direction of His Majesty's surveyors; and he maintained that his royal highness, having the same conviction in his mind, and considering that the money was not his own, had made it a point never to touch a shilling of it. Mr. Pitt repelled with indignant contempt the illiberal reflections which had been cast upon his motives; and he observed, that if he had meant to have entrapped the servants of the Prince into an improper use of the money, he must have taken them at once for egregious fools, as well as egregious knaves, which description every one knew did not belong to the very respectable gentlemen who belonged to his royal highness's household.

At the close of the session, Mr. Grey moved an address to His Majesty, praying that parliament might not be prorogued until some distinct information should be communicated relative to the

causes of the present armament. This motion was seconded at great length and with considerable vehemence by Mr. Fox, who reprobated the conduct pursued towards Russia in the most indignant language. He was supported by Mr. Sheridan with his accustomed readiness of wit and humour; but neither his sarcastic exultation over the ministers on account of their silence, nor his bold attempt to put a limitation upon the royal prerogative of making peace and war, could give effect to a motion, which, though parliamentary privilege might warrant, would, if carried, have shorn the crown of its brightest beams.

The speech of Mr. Sheridan, on the subject of the proposed address, was remarkable only for the extraordinary position which he advanced, that the power of the king to declare war without consulting the two houses of parliament is a defect in the constitution, and tends to produce public calamity. It is inconceivable how a notion so repugnant to every principle of sound policy and practical experience could have entered into the imagination of any man, since the unshackled prerogative of making war is no less essential to the insurance of success, than that of negotiating treaties is to the security of peace. Was this right of the crown to be abridged, and war and peace to depend upon the issue of parliamentary councils, the vigour of preparations would be paralyzed by the delay, and the best



designs rendered abortive by the chance of disclosure. Before an effective blow could be struck, the open debates in parliament would put the enemy upon his guard; besides which, the selfish interests and conflicting sentiments of a mixed assembly would, in the very nature of things, as in the case of the Russian armament, act like a torpedo upon the energies of government, and prove of incalculable advantage to the hostile powers. The British constitution is already furnished with sufficient checks upon the undue exercise of the regal power; and any farther restrictions would only serve to increase popular discontent, encourage faction, and expose the honour and strength of the nation, to the arts of caballing intriguers, and the machinations of foreign enemies.

## CHAPTER XX.

*Dilapidated Condition of Drury Lane Theatre.—Proposals for the Erection of a new Building on an extended Scale.—The old Theatre pulled down —Difficulties in the Purchase of the Patent.—Heavy Expences incurred by the Want of Foresight.—Illness and Death of Mrs. Sheridan.—Remarkable Mortality in her Family.—Her excellent Character.—Her poetical Genius.*

THE attention of Mr. Sheridan was now called to the state of Drury Lane Theatre, which, according to the report of the surveyors, was such as to render public performances no longer safe, either to the actors or the audience. In consequence of this representation, it was resolved that the old building should be taken down, and a new one, on an extended scale, and an improved plan, erected upon the same scite. To carry this scheme into execution, proposals were issued for raising the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand pounds by three hundred debentures of five hundred pounds each, payable in three instalments, and bearing an interest of five per cent. for one hundred years. When these terms were made known, the design met with universal approbation; and so ready were the people to subscribe, that in a very short time the shares bore a premium of five per cent.

Of the sum to be thus raised, it was intended to

devote eighty thousand pounds for the completion of the new theatre, sixty thousand in clearing off mortgages upon the former establishment, and to reserve the remaining ten thousand for contingent expenses. Matters being thus arranged, the old playhouse of Drury Lane closed for the last time on the fourth of June, 1791; and within a little time the space which it occupied was entirely cleared for the foundation of the magnificent structure that was to supply its place. But as it was impossible to complete the work before the ensuing season, an agreement was entered into with the proprietors of the Opera House for the use of that building, where accordingly the Drury Lane company performed, at advanced prices of admission, on the twenty-second of September; and continued to play there, with the customary intermissions, till the season of 1793, when they removed to the little theatre in the Haymarket. The corner stone of the new edifice had been laid on the fourth of September the preceding year, but the work went on very slowly; and the principal reason assigned for the delay was the oversight of not having secured in time the purchase of the dormant patent granted by Charles the Second to Killegrew. When the idea was formed of extending the concern of Drury Lane, the possession of that patent became a material object for the benefit of the subscribers, and to prevent the intrusion of a third theatre. With this

view, a negotiation took place between Messrs. Sheridan and Linley on the one part, and Mr. Thomas Harris, of Covent Garden Theatre, and the holder of the patent, on the other. The patent was estimated to be worth fifteen thousand pounds, and Mr. Harris; who held forty out of the sixty parts into which it was divided, agreed to dispose of it for eleven thousand five hundred pounds. On this assurance, and entertaining no apprehensions that any impediments would afterwards arise, the proprietors of Drury Lane caused the old house to be pulled down, and the necessary arrangements to be made for the magnificent building which was to supply its place. But when the transfer of the dormant patent was expected, according to the terms of the bargain, a difficulty occurred in the discovery that there were other persons concerned in the property, and who unfortunately had not been consulted. These were Mr. George White and Mr. Thomas Warren, who having married the two daughters of Mr. Powell, formerly a proprietor with Mr. Harris, of Covent Garden Theatre, obtained by virtue of that connexion a claim to fourteen parts of the patent. The first of those gentlemen being now called upon to join in the assignment, refused to give his consent on any other condition than that of being paid five thousand pounds for his share.

Here was a difficulty, which became more vexatious from the consideration that it might have been



prevented by timely care, or lessened by prudent management.

There was, however, a strange want of common foresight in neglecting to examine the minute state of the concern, and to provide for every object connected with it, before the old theatre was destroyed, and the means determinately fixed for the completion of the new building, agreeable to the plan proposed and the public expectation. But without the security afforded by the possession of the patent, nothing could be done and ; while the disputes on this subject ran high, with every appearance of terminating in an appeal to the law, Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Linley were paying interest for the first instalment upon an undertaking that was lying in a state of idleness, though charged with a heavy ground-rent to the Duke of Bedford, and the company performing at an enormous expense in the Haymarket, where the house was almost filled every night with the free admission tickets of the new and old proprietors. Of a business so ruinous and complicated it would not be easy to form any thing like a fair conjecture as to the probable loss, but certainly those persons were far from being guilty of exaggeration who estimated it at twenty thousand pounds. But the concern was farther injured by the extraordinary lapse of time between the demolition of the old house and the opening of the new one ; and also by the necessity which the proprietors were under of pay-

ing the sum of nine thousand six hundred and twenty-five pounds for the disputed part of the patent.

In addition to these anxieties and troubles, Mr. Sheridan had to endure an affliction still more painful and hard to be borne by a feeling mind. His amiable and accomplished partner, who had been long in a declining state of health, which was materially injured by the loss of her sisters and brothers, began now to exhibit the most alarming symptoms of a preliminary consumption. Medical skill being in vain exerted to check the progress of an insidious disorder, which was accelerated by a variety of acute distresses, the Bristol waters were recommended as a last resource. Thither, to use the language of the celebrated John Wilkes, "this most beautiful flower that ever grew in Nature's garden" was removed in the spring of 1792; but the malady was too far gone to admit the hope of a cure, and it became aggravated by mental suffering and the most mortifying circumstances. One morning, when Mrs. Sheridan was about to take an airing on the neighbouring downs, she found that the carriage and horses had been just taken in execution by an unfeeling creditor.

It may naturally be supposed that a shock so sudden and rude would operate with deadly effect upon a frame already enfeebled beyond the power of recovery, and hanging as it were by an imperceptible thread over the margin of the grave. The

stroke indeed acted with similar violence to the wintry blast upon a tender plant, for the sufferer, bending before it, burst into tears, and retired to her chamber, out of which she never came again till the lifeless form was conveyed to the silent mansion, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest."

At the time of her death, which happened on the twenty-eighth of June, 1792, Mrs. Sheridan was in the thirty-eighth year of her age; and on the seventh of July her remains were interred by the side of her sister, Mrs. Tickell, in the cathedral church of Wells, of which city their mother was a native.

Few instances of family affliction have been more remarkable than the accumulation of losses which fell in rapid succession upon old Mr. Linley. His son Thomas, the celebrated composer and performer on the violin, was carried off in a few days by a raging fever; another fine youth, named Samuel, was accidentally drowned in a pond; Maria, who had been the delight of the lovers of harmony by her extraordinary vocal powers, expired at the harpsichord while singing the praises of her Redeemer; her sister Mary, the wife of Mr. Richard Tickell, was cut down in the flower of her age by a consumption of the lungs; and she was quickly followed by her only remaining sister, Mrs. Sheridan, who fell a victim to the same disorder, both cases being extremely aggravated by severe domestic calamity.

The loss of such children, who were the pride of his active life, and promised to be the solace of his declining years, was keenly felt by Mr. Linley; and though he possessed considerable strength of mind, with a correspondent firmness of bodily constitution, these repeated shocks were too much even for his energetic powers.

The remembrance of his unmarried daughter, whose musical talents were the theme of universal admiration, never failed to open the bleeding wound inflicted by the awful manner of her dissolution; and whenever an air occurred which revived the recollection of her enchanting voice, the sensibility of the parent was sure to be awakened in a manner that kindled the most tender sympathy in those who beheld the affecting scene. But the death of Mrs. Sheridan appeared to complete the climax of his woes; and this melancholy event was embittered by many painful reflections on distresses, which if they did not actually hasten the catastrophe, unquestionably contributed to render it more afflicting. Mr. Linley, in fact, never recovered from the effects of this last heavy blow, which shattered his reason, and hurried him to the grave, leaving a widow and one son to lament the sad wreck of a family which was no less distinguished by the private and social virtues, than by originality of reciprocal genius, and high professional excellence.

Mrs. Sheridan had two children, a son and a daughter, the first of whom is now living, but the latter died in the state of infancy while under the



fostering care of Mrs. Canning, the esteemed friend of her departed parent, and the mother of the celebrated orator and statesman.

In her person Mrs. Sheridan was a model of perfect symmetry, her form light and airy, yet graceful and dignified; with features cast in Nature's finest mould, and uncommonly expressive when brightened up in conversation or in singing, though at other times there was a languishing sweetness spread over her fine oval countenance, which appeared to indicate either pensive care, or internal decay. Sir Joshua Reynolds very appropriately painted her portrait in the character of Saint Cecilia; and Mr. Ozias Humphreys, the friend of her earliest years, drew another, in which Mrs. Sheridan is represented as leading her child with maternal delight and solicitude. Of the first, a metzotinto print was scraped many years ago, and copies of it have been multiplied; but of the latter, which upon the whole is the most correct likeness, an engraving is now for the first time executed purposely to illustrate the present memoirs.

In addition to what has been observed on the musical talents of this fascinating woman, it may be proper to state that she united true science to vocal power, and an admirable genius to skill in execution. The favourite song written by her husband, beginning, "When 'tis night, and the mid-watch is come," &c. was set by her: and she likewise composed the music for the popu-

lar pantomime of Robinson Crusoe, and some other pieces.

One specimen of her poetry has already been given in a preceding chapter; but it would be doing injustice to her memory to pass over in silence another of her productions, which is not more characteristic of an elegant understanding, than expressive of the tenderest sensibility. On the death of her brother Thomas, who was seven years younger than herself, Mrs. Sheridan wrote the following beautiful stanzas addressed to the violin, on which instrument the deceased excelled:

Sweet instrument of him for whom I mourn,  
Tuneful companion of my Lycid's hours,  
How liest thou now neglected and forlorn!  
What skilful hand shall now call forth thy powers?

Ah! none like his can reach those liquid notes,  
So soft, so sweet, so eloquently clear;  
To live beyond the touch, and gently float  
In dying modulations on the ear!

Thus o'er my Lycid's lyre as I complain'd,  
And kiss'd the strings where he was wont to play;  
While yet in pensive sadness I remain'd,  
Methought it sigh'd, and sighing seemed to say:

"Ah! me, forlorn, forsaken, now no more  
Shall fame and just applause around me wait;  
No power my gentle master can restore,  
And I, alas! will share his hapless fate.

“Fled is that spirit, chill’d that youthful fire,  
Which taught those strains with harmony replete;  
And cold that hand which only can inspire  
My senseless form to utter sounds so sweet.

“Those sounds melodious ne’er again shall please:  
No tuneful strain from me shall ever flow,  
Save o’er my trembling strings a sighing breeze,  
To call one sad, soft note of tender woe.

“Else, ah! for ever mute let me remain,  
Unstrung, untun’d, forgotten let me be;  
Guard me from curious eye, and touch profane,  
And let me rest in mournful sympathy.

“One fate with thee, dear master, let me share;  
Like thee in silent darkness let me lie:  
My fame without thee is not worth my care,  
With thee alone it liv’d, with thee shall die!”

Copies of these verses soon getting into circulation, particularly at Bath, the late Mr. Pratt, who then resided as a bookseller in that city, wrote the following piece, purporting to be an address from

*Her Brother's Lyre to Mrs. Sheridan.*

This said—a solemn silence breath’d around:  
Cecilia wept upon her Lycid’s lyre;  
The pensive breeze then gave a sighing sound,  
And the strings seem’d to tremble and expire.

One hollow murmur, like the dying moan,  
Was heard to vibrate then, with pauses slow,  
From the sad instrument, when thus the tone  
Gave modulations of a softer woe.

“Cease, beauteous mourner! partner of my grief,  
Tuneful associate of my lost despair,  
Thou, only thou, can'st bring this breast relief;  
Thy sympathy alone can sooth my care.

“What though,—ah! stroke severe! our Lycid's dead,  
Nor more, alas! can ravish mortal ear;  
What though the soul of melody is fled,  
His blest attendant, to th' harmonious sphere;

“Struck by Cecilia's hand, I yet may live;  
Her magic touch again can tune my frame;  
Her cherub voice my spirit yet revive,  
And sounds of heavenly sorrow grace my fame.

“But should nor dulcet song, nor music's art,  
Nor social sighs, which mourn the youth we love;  
Have power to heal the sister's wounded heart,  
Nor to these chords forlorn a solace prove;

“Ah! still together let our sorrows join,  
And this sad form yet boast thy gentle aid;  
Lycid's companion sure should still be thine;  
Still should'st thou kiss the strings where he has play'd.”

It would be paying the reader a bad compliment to institute any thing like a comparison between these two performances, one of which is all harmony and feeling, and the other little else but common-



place sentiment, conveyed in affected phrase and jingling rhimes. The verses of Mrs. Sheridan, like the *Lycidas* of Milton, find a response in every bosom, and excite emotions of tenderness corresponding with the grief of the mourner; but the imitative stanzas of the novelist neither gratify the ear, nor awaken sympathy. All that can be said of them is that they are highly adulatory, and that, unlike poetical addresses in general, the compliments are just.

It may surely excite surprise, and regret, that among the numerous admirers and particular companions of Mrs. Sheridan, not one was found to strike the mournful strings at her obsequies, or to suspend the votive wreath upon her tomb: but estimable as her character was in all the relations of social life, and brilliant as were the accomplishments which rendered her the delight of an extensive circle of friends after her retirement from public observation, the muses at her death maintained an unaccountable silence, and even kindred genius was dumb in its grief. The only recorded tribute of respect paid to her memory, consisted of a short but expressive eulogium by an eminent physician, and which was inserted in one of the most respectable literary journals. This neat memorial concluded with the following classical inscription, no less felicitous in its description of the virtues of one sister, than in its allusion to the peculiar circumstances attending the death of another:

## IN OBITUM

DOM. ELIZ. SHERIDAN.

Forma, voce, atque ingenio,  
inter ornatas ornatissimæ,  
Ab illa imo amores ita suspiret amicus.  
Eheu ! eheu ! lugeant mortales !  
Eja vero gaudeunt Cœlestis,  
Dulcis ad amplexus,  
Sociens jam Citharæ melos,  
Redit pergrata,  
en iterum soror ;  
Suaviusque nil manet  
HOSANNIS.

## CHAPTER XXI.

*Parliamentary Affairs.—Disputes with Mr. Pitt on the Finances.—Defence of the Minister by Mr. Rose.—Singular Reply of Mr. Sheridan.—Motion on the Armament against Russia.—Speech of Mr. Sheridan on that Subject.—His Compliment to the present Earl of Liverpool.—His Opposition to the New System of Police.—Renewed Motion on the Royal Burghs of Scotland.—Society under the Name of Friends of the People.—Motion for Parliamentary Reform.—Breach in the Opposition.—Strange Conduct of Mr. Fox.*

FROM theatrical concerns and domestic afflictions, we must now follow Mr. Sheridan to the seat of public business, and the arena of political contention. During the session of Parliament, which began on the last day of January, 1792, he was a less frequent speaker than usual, owing to the perplexities in which his affairs were involved, and the distressing cloud that hung over his family. Yet he was not so absorbed by these cares as wholly to neglect his senatorial duties, or to avoid taking an occasional part in the debates.

When the minister brought forward his annual account of the finances, and took credit for the flourishing state of the revenue, of which he gave a pretty clear proof in the reduction of taxes, and by carrying a surplus of near half a million to the

discharge of the national debt, his speech was turned into ridicule by Mr. Sheridan, who endeavoured to account for the boasted surplus, by ascribing it to the new taxes that had been recently imposed, and to the improved mode of collecting the old ones. Instead, also, of giving credit to the minister for the prosperous increase of the public income, Mr. Sheridan repeated all his old charges of extravagance, and demanded why the unfunded debt was not liquidated? But the artillery of his wit, for it would be preposterous to call it argument, was levelled chiefly at that part of the statement which repeated the promise held out in the speech from the throne of a repeal of some of the unpopular taxes.

Aware of the effect which such an assurance was likely to produce in favour of ministers, Mr Sheridan very ingeniously contrived to place it in a point of view calculated to deprive them of that advantage, by representing it as coming in the nature of a boon from the crown, instead of originating with the House of Commons. He observed that the grace ought constitutionally to have emanated from that branch of the legislature which held the strings of the public purse: but this would not have answered the crafty purpose of the minister, whose real object was to cover his blunders, or at least to atone for them, by saying to the people: "I have involved you in a war with Spain:—here, there's a tax upon malt for you:—I have made the English name ridiculous all over the world, by bullying



Russia :—here, take back the female servants, I have no use for them :—I have involved you in a war with Tippoo Saib :—take your candles a half-penny cheaper in the pound.—Thus,” continued the orator, “the people are taught to love misfortune, —to be enamoured of misconduct,—and, if an administration should succeed, where wisdom and prudence produced their usual effects of security and quiet, the right honourable gentleman would be at the head of the most violent and clamorous opposition this country ever witnessed. They would call out for a change in this language, ‘give us back that bustling and dangerous administration that went on arming and unarming; taxing and untaxing; who committed so many blunders, that they were for ever making atonement; who broke our heads, that they might give us a plaster. We abhor this uniform system of order and quiet.’”

This strain of ironical sophistry being considered by Mr. Pitt as a full admission of what he had advanced on the increased state of the revenue, and the prosperous circumstances of the country, his opponent angrily replied that the right honourable gentleman had completely misrepresented what he said and meant. If he thought that he gave him any credit for the surplus of the revenue, or the general prosperity of the country, the contrary was the fact; for he never had ascribed to his ingenuity either the one or the other; though he certainly

had ascribed to his art and management the use that was made of both.

In a subsequent debate on the same subject, Mr. Sheridan renewed these objections; and happening among other things to condemn the practice of anticipating, or taking into the account the produce of the existing quarter, which he regarded as a novelty, he was reminded by Mr. Rose that the same custom had been followed by the administration of which he made a part.

The adduction of this unlucky precedent, which, though it might be no justification of the measure in itself, certainly freed it from the charge of being an innovation, and drew from Mr. Sheridan a reply that evinced his acuteness of wit and command of language, even when he had it not in his power to refute a plain fact, or to repel its application. "An honourable gentleman had said, that when he was in the high and important office of Secretary to the Treasury, the sinking fund had been anticipated for three quarters; as if a person in that subordinate station was to be responsible for all the measures of finance. The character of a measure might sometimes point out the author; and when he saw dull and blundering tax-bills brought forward with little of mind, and nothing of liberality, in which cunning was substituted for wisdom, and tricking for intelligence, he could not help supposing that they were not the production of any man in the superior departments of office, and attribu-

ting them to some of his subordinates. In justice, however, to the honourable men who thought him worthy of a situation under them, it was necessary to remark, that they had never proposed the anticipation alluded to as part of a system ; and that it was with them only a temporary and unavoidable expedient, to cover an old deficiency.”

The asperity of this retort, and the insinuations thrown out upon the ability and services of Mr. Rose, plainly betrayed the soreness which his statement had produced, though it is difficult to see how any offence could reasonably have been taken at a correction which only defended ministers by the conduct of their predecessors.

At the beginning of this session, the subject of the Russian armament was revived in a motion brought forward by the late Mr. Whitbread, to obtain a parliamentary censure upon our interference between the Empress and the Porte. On this occasion, Mr. Sheridan displayed his wonted powers in a speech of considerable brilliancy, which touched upon many topics besides the direct one that constituted the subject of discussion. On that hackneyed theme, indeed, there was but little left to say, and that little on the part of Mr. Sheridan consisted of a burlesque description of the power of Russia, and a taunt against the minister for not having been able to render effectual assistance to Turkey. With regard to the former, he said, “If indeed Russia, commanding a numerous

and hardy race of subjects, possessing great extent of territory, without disunion, and accumulation of power without unwieldiness, were to take possession of Constantinople, to occupy the Euxine, the Hamoaze and Catwater, with her fleets, where no European eye could see or examine their force, till they poured into the Mediterranean, then, he would admit, that her power might be dangerous to this country: but before he admitted that we were to arm to prevent this danger, the minister should prove that it was probable; and if he did this, he must stand convicted of a great crime in abandoning an object of so much importance, without laying such information before parliament as would enable them to compare the probability of the danger with the practicability of preventing it." On the failure of our interference, which was owing to the unconstitutional and illegal conduct pursued by the head of the opposition, Mr. Sheridan indulged himself in a vein of bantering humour, by representing Mr. Pitt as the Grand Vizier, and Mr. Dundas as the Reis Effendi, entering the Divan at the Porte. "But," said he, "what sort of reception, and what sort of dialogue, in the case of such a mission, would have taken place? Why, the Mussulmans would have asked him what glorious terms have you procured with your grand fleet? Have you humbled Russia? Does she tremble at your power? Does she crouch? Have you burnt her fleets for us? Have you demolished



Petersburgh?—A melancholy no! must have been the answer to all these interrogatories. What! does she not repent that she provoked you? But, at least, have you not made her give up Oczakow, that your sovereign has pledged himself for? No, none of all this. Instead of telling them to be tranquil in their minds, instead of assuring them that the pigeon of Mahomet might perch in safety, and no longer fear that the eagle of Russia would pounce upon the harmless victim, they must say, no, none of all this. But we have engaged, that if you do not comply with every tittle which she demands of you before we presumed to interfere, we shall abandon you to all the consequences of war.”

In the same jocular spirit of treating serious subjects, Mr. Sheridan ridiculed the jealousy and activity manifested by England to preserve the balance of power; but in this part of his speech he fortunately provided his own confutation, by eulogising the new state of things in France, as affording an example of the moderation of a free government. The establishment of such a power in that country, he asserted, would not be attended with any cause of alarm, because it was not likely to wear a hostile aspect, as France was throwing away those political vices which we were taking up. This paradoxical position was illustrated in a very singular manner by the following sorites: “We must meddle and interfere in the affairs of other powers: we must have Holland for our ally,

and Prussia to protect Holland:—that Austria may not attack Prussia, we must excite the Turks against Austria:—and to enable the Turks to defend themselves against Russia, we must get Sweden to make war on Russia. But however far we went on, something more was still wanting; like the earth, supported by an eagle, the eagle by an elephant, the elephant by a tortoise, and so on ad infinitum, a support being always wanted for the last supporter. All this we had done, and what had we got by it?—Disgrace, contempt, and reprobation.”

Throughout this speech, Mr. Sheridan continually glanced the severest arrows of his rhetoric against the minister; but in one passage his ideas were conveyed with peculiar felicity, by an elegant compliment on the one hand to the leader of the opposition, and a bitter invective on the other against his great rival.

“He loved,” he said, “to see the minister assimilate his character to that of the constitution. He would love in it those qualities which he himself possessed; every sympathy of his nature would dispose him to reverence and to cherish them; and pursuing ostensible objects by direct and honourable means, he would tower by the natural energy of candour and wisdom above the miserable props of chicanery and cunning. If, instead of this, a minister should assimilate the character of the constitution to his own,

his progress might be towering indeed in lofty misery, but it would be bottomed in shallow craft."

It was in this debate that the present Earl of Liverpool made his first essay as a parliamentary orator, and in a speech of considerable length gave a substantial promise of those abilities which have ripened into all the sterling qualities of an illustrious statesman. Mr. Sheridan did no more than justice when he felicitated the house on the acquisition of such talents; but he paid a much greater tribute to what he professed to admire, when he selected one or two passages of trivial import for correction, and leaving all the chain of argument on the necessity of maintaining our commercial and political preponderance untouched. The agitation of this question, however, had not the effect intended by the renewal of it; for though the debate was adjourned, the division, instead of shaking the credit of ministers, gave them cause for triumph, by proving their increasing strength.

This year was rendered remarkable, among other things, by the introduction of an improved system of police, for the better administration of justice in those parts of the metropolis lying beyond the jurisdiction of the civic magistracy. The want of such a regulation had long been severely felt by the public; and no one had more strenuously urged the necessity of a reform in the municipal government than Mr. Sheridan; yet, when the bill was actually brought into the House of Commons for

that purpose, he ridiculed it as a mere job, and nothing more than a system of influence. Fortunately, however, for the benefit of an extended population, no farther opposition was made to the plan; and Mr. Sheridan lived long enough to see his error in condemning a great moral experiment as inefficacious before it was tried.

His powers were displayed with much greater force in the combat which he maintained with Mr. Dundas on the charge of grievances in the government of the royal burghs of Scotland. It has already been observed that this subject was entrusted to the management of Mr. Sheridan by the complainants as far back as the year 1787, and that his interference in the local polity of Scotland had occasioned no little jealousy among the northern members. Notwithstanding this, and the repeated defeats which had attended the attempts to obtain a committee for the investigation of the alleged abuses as the necessary prelude to some legislative measure for the removal of them, the petitioners persevered with unabated assiduity; and their zeal did not want for correspondent energy in the exertions of their ingenious advocate. The industry of Mr. Sheridan in this business was indeed very remarkable, considering his habitual negligence, and the repulsive intricacy of the subject. But there are occasions when the most sluggish indolence is roused to uncommon activity, and when minds the most erratic become fixed



for a time in close and patient study. Thus it was in the present instance; though it is hard to conjecture what could be the stimulus to so much ardour and diligence, since there was nothing on the face of the complaint to render the management of it popular, nor had the concern any peculiar interest to render it inviting. So far, however, from treating the matter cursorily, and with indifference, Mr. Sheridan entered into it with warmth, and urged it forward the more earnestly in proportion to the difficulties that were to be cleared, and the opposition with which he had to contend. On the fifth of April he moved for a committee to take the subject into consideration, but without success; in consequence of which, he brought it regularly before the house in the shape of a resolution, that it was incumbent to proceed to the examination of the alleged grievances, and to provide a remedy for the same. The speech with which he introduced this motion was distinguished by perspicuity in the statement of the case, and logical accuracy in the direction of the argument; its principal address, however, lay in the personal attack upon Mr. Dundas, who had uniformly resisted all enquiry into the abuses of which the petitioners complained, and whose interest was so powerful as to render application for redress hitherto unavailing.

In allusion to the evasions and cavils which had been adopted for the purpose of eluding the

appointment of a committee, Mr. Sheridan said, "the right honourable gentleman knew that enquiry would produce truth—truth would demand justice—and justice would be fatal to the cause, of which he was ashamed, and yet was afraid to have it exposed." After observing that he did not seek favour, but justice; nor endeavour to sanction innovation by the reform of abuse, he descanted at great length upon the beneficial effects of the French Revolution, which he had no hesitation in pronouncing to be the greatest blessing that could happen to this country; as by insuring our tranquillity abroad, it left us completely at leisure to set about the necessary work of renovating our own constitution. Mr. Sheridan seems to have been tempted into this imprudent digression with a view of introducing an encomium upon a new political association, consisting, as he said, of men whose characters, situations, and consequence, placed them above the suspicion of sinister motives, and who had resolved to bear a standard, to which all who sought redress of grievance or reform of abuse, by loyal and constitutional means, might repair with confidence.

On the immediate object of his motion, Mr. Sheridan was replied to in detail by some of the Scotch members; besides whom, Mr. Rolle thought it necessary to animadvert upon that part of his speech which recommended the example of France as worthy of being followed in this country.

The member for Devonshire is reported to have said that his regard for the constitution led him to oppose every motion for reform that had been or could be brought forward: that with respect to the concluding declaration of Mr. Sheridan, it was one of the most inflammatory, wicked, and dangerous speeches he had ever heard; and that as long as he had a seat in parliament he was determined never to countenance any species of reform whatever, because he knew that the constitution of this country was the best and most admirable in the world.

These intemperate invectives made no impression on the mind of him to whom they were applied; but the imprudent observation which accompanied them elicited this severe and cutting retort—that the honourable gentleman, who was so zealous an admirer of the constitution, as to be content to take it upon trust, without examining its principles, or comparing its excellencies with its defects, acted wisely; for to do the one, required only confidence in the commendations bestowed upon it by others; but, to do the other, required knowledge and understanding.

The arguments of the other speakers in this debate received a distinct and very able reply from Mr. Sheridan, whose sincerity having been called in question by Mr. Dundas, he repelled the imputation, by saying, that “the right honourable gentleman had doubtless been attentive to the

consistency of his own political conduct to attend much to that of so humble an individual as himself; which must be his excuse for an assertion that could not be supported by a single fact." Mr. Sheridan, however, called upon the right honourable gentleman, to mention a time in which he had not been as zealous an advocate for the rights of the people, as he professed to be at that moment. That those rights were sacred, and that reform was necessary whenever they were violated, were the first political principles he had adopted. With those principles he had come into parliament; with those principles he had connected himself with men who merited his confidence, and the confidence of their country. If the right honourable gentleman supposed that he had abandoned these principles, or that he was under any party influence and private obligation, which withheld him from acting upon them, he desired, once for all, to tell him that he was grossly misinformed.

Having thus defended the integrity of his own motives, and the consistency of his conduct, he retorted with great felicity upon his accuser, by observing, that "the right honourable gentleman talked of his own popularity in Scotland; that he had stood candidate for a county, and carried his election against all the influence of government, by more than three to one; with much more, implied by his manner, which his natural modesty would not allow him to express by words. But



then came the conclusion—all this was before he was tried as a political man ; and from that time to the present, he had taken care to have the influence of government in his favour. To this popularity, however, he would advise him not to trust with too much confidence, any more than to the boasted apathy of his temper. He admitted that the right honourable gentleman would not wince for trifles ; for, as Montesquieu said, you must flay a Muscovite to make him feel ; and the right honourable gentleman had sometimes shewn that even his insensibility was not impregnable.”

But wit could not turn aside the vigilance of the secretary, nor eloquence command a majority in the house, which divided against the motion ; and again rejected it on its being brought forward, a few days afterwards, in the form of a petition, from the complaining burgesses, praying to be heard by counsel. Mr. Sheridan, in support of this application, renewed his sarcastic observations at the expense of Mr. Dundas ; though it may be questioned, whether some of these remarks were not more calculated to retard the object of the petitioners, than to facilitate the attainment of it, by irritating private feeling into obstinate resentment, when it might have been conciliated by a mild demeanour and temperate expression.

It has been already noticed, that a new political association was formed at this time in London, and that Mr. Sheridan took an oppor-

tunity of announcing it while yet in an embryo state, with a parental anticipation of the extraordinary effects which would result from its labours. Shortly afterwards, this promising conception was hatched into life, at the Free Masons' Tavern, and received the curious title of FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE, importing, as it should seem, that the great body of the nation stood in need of such a benevolent institution, to rescue them from their enemies. But as the revolutionary flame, kindled in France, was at that moment destroying all the distinctions of society, under the plea of restoring the rights of human nature, it was not uncharitable to regard the appearance of so palpable an imitation among ourselves, with the dread that it might lead to similar evils. Many of the members of this unseasonable union were no doubt very honourable characters, and far enough from entertaining any sinister designs against the constitution of the country; but they were leagued with others of a different description, and from whose violent principles there was every reason to apprehend the full exercise of revolutionary practices, without any scruple about the means or the consequences. Though none of these republican zealots were placed on the committee, yet the very enrolment of their names as members of the society was of itself sufficient to bring the whole scheme under suspicion, and to excite alarm in the minds of all who valued our

civil and religious establishment too highly to risk the danger of its destruction by projects of indefinite reform. The committee consisted of the following persons: William Baker, Esq. M. P. chairman; Charles Grey, Esq. M. P.; Samuel Whitbread, jun. Esq. M. P.; John Wharton, Esq. M. P.; Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Esq. M. P.; Philip Francis, Esq. M. P.; Hon. Thomas Maitland, M. P.; William Henry Lambton, Esq. M. P.; George Rous, Esq.; John Godfrey, Esq.; William Cuninghame, Esq.; and James Mackintosh, Esq.

There was an evident intention in this selection to make a strong impression upon the public in favour of the association; but if these persons, and some others, were men of moderate sentiments, the same could hardly be said of Mr. Stone, and Lord Edward Fitzgerald. Besides those ardent spirits, there were in this motley assemblage of reformers, Dr. Towers, Dr. Kippis, and a number of avowed Unitarians, as they called themselves, who blended politics with religion, and were for reducing both the church and the state to a simple platform of republican equality.

With whom the design of this heterogeneous combination originated, is not told, and it would be needless to enquire; but the conception was no sooner formed than carried into execution; and within a few days after the appointment of the



committee, it issued an "address to the people of Great Britain;" in which several authorities were adduced in favour of parliamentary reform, and then avowing that object, without stating either the grievance or the remedy. The composition, indeed, was framed in a high strain of juvenile declamation; full of swelling words, and rounded periods, but specifying nothing, as an actual evil, that called for such an association at that portentous period. In an address to the nation, from a private body met together for the purpose of obtaining a correction of public abuses, it was natural to have expected something like an exposition of facts, rather than a bold and sweeping assumption of the necessity of the confederacy. It is easier, however, to inflame than to enlighten; to rouse the passions, than to direct the judgment; and of this the French revolution exhibited abundant proofs, in the effects produced by brawling orators, and unprincipled writers, upon their credulous and discontented countrymen. The address to the people, from their associated friends, as they called themselves, was an admirable copy of the style then so much in vogue, and so terribly powerful in its operation on the continent. Mirabeau himself, had he written in English, as well as he did in French, could not have delivered a more glowing eulogium upon the work of devastation in which he was engaged, than is to be found in the following justification of a political change in this coun-



try, by the example of what was going on in France. "We deny," say the English reformers, "the existence of any resemblance whatever between the cases of the two kingdoms; and we utterly disclaim the necessity of resorting to similar remedies. We do not believe, that at this day, an absolute avowed despotism, in the hands of the executive power, would be endured in this country. But who can say to what conclusion the silent unresisted operation of abuses, incessantly acting, and constantly increasing, may lead us hereafter; what habits it may gradually create; what power it may finally establish? The abuses in the government of France were suffered to gather and accumulate, until nothing but an eruption could put an end to them. The discontent of the people was converted into despair. Preventive remedies were either not thought of in time, or were not proposed until it was too late to apply them with effect. The subversion of the ancient government ensued. The inference from this comparison is at once so powerful and so obvious, that we know not by what argument to illustrate or enforce it. We mean to avert forever from our country the calamities inseparable from such convulsions. If there be, as it is said, in any part of this kingdom a disposition to promote confusion, or even to arrive at improvement by unconstitutional and irregular causes, we hold ourselves as strictly pledged to resist that

disposition, wherever it may appear, as to pursue our own objects by unexceptionable methods."

And yet it could hardly have escaped the observation of the committee, that the same kind of pledge had been given by the innovators of France, who made the most solemn declarations of their loyalty while they were undermining the throne; and who, like the republicans in our own country, in the preceding century, levied war against the king for the safety of his person and the security of the monarchy. Men who set out in conjunction for the accomplishment of a great political change in the government of any country, always begin with the declaration of constitutional principles, and protestations against the perversion of their real objects. But they who honestly, perhaps, commence the work of public reform, and who provide what they deem the most efficient plan for the accomplishment of it, are seldom suffered to see the end of their labours, being in general supplanted by more active and turbulent spirits, that are not to be restrained within the bounds of moderation, or guided by the dictates of conscience. This has been invariably the characteristic of all the convulsions which have effected a radical change in the forms of government among civilized nations; and it was so remarkably the case in France at the very time when this society was constituted, as to reflect discredit upon those who took the lead in it, for not perceiving the fallacy of

positively promising what it might be out of their power to perform.

One of the first steps taken by this political club was to pass a resolution that a motion should be made early in the ensuing session for introducing a parliamentary reform. Conformably with this proposal, Mr. Grey, on the thirtieth of April, gave notice of his intention to carry the design of the society into execution, by submitting to the consideration of parliament a motion respecting a reform in the representation of the people. Mr. Pitt upon this occasion delivered a very candid and elaborate speech, in which he acknowledged that his sentiments on the subject had undergone a material change; though he admitted, that if some mode were adopted, by which the people could have any additional security for a continuance of the blessings which they now enjoyed, it would be an improvement in the constitution of the country. This was the extent of his object: further than this he never wished to go; and if this could be obtained, without the risk of losing what we possessed, he should think it wise to make the experiment. Having made this declaration of his sentiments, the minister proceeded to consider the time and mode selected for the discussion of the question. With regard to the first, he could not help thinking that it was very improperly chosen for the purpose of trying hazardous experiments, which shewed as if the lessons recently exhibited



to the world had been neglected ; but upon the latter he was particularly severe : and having censured in a becoming manner the advertisements of the society of the friends of the people, he said that he had seen, with concern, members of that house connected with others who did not confine themselves simply to the question of parliamentary reform, but who were direct and avowed enemies to the very essence of the English constitution. This afforded ground for suspicion that the motion was nothing better than a preliminary step to the overthrow of the established system of government, which he had no hesitation in designating as the best that was ever settled on the habitable globe. Mr. Pitt added, that the proposed motion was an attempt to copy the madness that had been called liberty in another country ; but which was a condition at open war with genuine freedom and social order ; a state, in short, to which despotism itself was preferable ;—a state in which liberty could not possibly exist for a single day ;—but that if it appeared in the morning, it must perish before sun-set.

The society of the friends of the people was defended by Mr. Fox, who admitted that some of the members were violent republicans ; but as an excuse for this strange mixture in the club, he retorted by observing, that if they were bad, some of the friends of the minister were much worse, being decided advocates of arbitrary power.



Mr. Sheridan went at greater length into a vindication of the society ; and in allusion to the violent republicans, who had found their way into it, or who, it was reasonable to suppose, would take an advantage of any innovation to effect a radical destruction of the constitution, he said that the true allies of such men were those who opposed a necessary and temperate reform ; who, on whatever sophistical arguments, abandoned their former principles in support of it. In this desultory speech, which, as usual, was made up of wit and sarcasm, he boasted of his acquaintance with Mr. Walker, and Mr. Cooper, of Manchester, two persons whose political principles differed not a shade from those advanced by Paine, in his *Rights of Man*. Mr. Burke having noticed, in strong terms, the intercourse between Cooper and the clubs of Paris, was retorted upon by Mr. Sheridan in a very singular manner, being reminded of his own alleged correspondence with the Americans, during the revolutionary contest in that country. This kind of reasoning might probably appear very convincing and satisfactory to those who could only judge of an argument by its humour and personality ; but in reality nothing could be more childish ; for let the conduct of Burke be whatever it would, the correspondence of English and French jacobins could derive no countenance from it ; but, what was worse, in attacking one old political friend for supposed in-

consistency and impropriety, Sheridan inadvertently made a thrust into the reputation of another: since, if Burke was deserving of censure for the part he took in behalf of the American insurgents, Mr. Fox had a much heavier account to settle in that respect. At the time when this conversation occurred in the House of Commons, Lord North was in his place, and both he and Fox must certainly have felt the allusion to former days very forcibly, when the one recollected how all his measures had been thwarted in the prosecution of that contest, and the other called to mind his correspondence with the revolutionary leaders in America, and their agents in Europe.

During the remainder of this session, Mr. Sheridan took no part in the debates; but he had the mortification to see the ranks of opposition thinned by the abdication of many of the most distinguished members in both houses, particularly the Duke of Portland, Earl Spencer, and Lord North, who supported the address to the throne, on the subject of the proclamation for the suppression of seditious meetings and publications. On that occasion his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales also thought it an act of incumbent duty to make a public declaration of his principles, as a peer of the realm. In giving his vote for the address, his Royal Highness observed, that the question at issue was in fact, whether the constitution was or was not to be maintained; whether the wild

ideas of untried theory were to conquer the wholesome maxims of established practice ; whether those laws, under which we had flourished for such a series of years, were to be subverted by a reform unsanctioned by the people. As a person nearly and dearly interested in the welfare, and, he should add, emphatically, the happiness of the people, it would be treason to the principles of his own mind, if he did not come forward and declare his disapprobation of the seditious publications and doctrines which had occasioned the motion before their lordships.

This speech had a great effect in strengthening the hands of government, at a critical period, when the grounds of apprehension for its safety became every day more unequivocal and alarming. Many, who had hitherto thought favourably of the French revolution, were now convinced by experience that their confidence had been woefully misplaced ; and they saw the necessity of sacrificing all private resentment and political attachments, for the sake of preserving the constitution of the country, when opinions, destructive of all existing establishments, were not only propagated with pestilential industry, but acted upon, as far as possible, in the organization of corresponding societies throughout the kingdom.

It was therefore no longer a question, who should take the lead in the councils of the nation, but what proceedings were the best to be adopted

for the support of order, and who should act most energetically in the defence of monarchy. With this view, the friends of ministers, and several of the most distinguished members of the opposition, concurred in the opinion, that a union of public talents was requisite for the general benefit. Mr. Pitt very readily signified his approbation of the measure; and with his consent an overture was made to Mr. Fox, who refused to assist in the establishment of any administration, unless his great rival would resign his situation at the head of the Treasury, and fall into the ranks under some other leader.

To have complied with such arrogant conditions, would have implied a consciousness of error or sense of weakness on the part of the minister, when in reality he felt confidence in the rectitude of his principles, and had the satisfaction to see his strength increasing every day by the popularity of his measures.

Whether this offensive proposition resulted from rooted resentment, or inordinate ambition, in Mr. Fox, both the refusal and the manner of it reflected no credit upon his patriotism; and, accordingly, his conduct underwent much animadversion from many of his warmest admirers and associates. Mr. Burke, who was extremely anxious to bring about this political union, which he considered as highly necessary at that awful juncture, for the safety of the nation, attributed the failure of the



design to the machinations of Mr. Sheridan, in alarming the fears of his great friend and political chief, by bringing to his recollection the dissatisfaction which a former coalition had excited among all parties. But the circumstances and the times were very different; and the projected alliance, though it might have been obnoxious to those who cloaked the worst purposes under the convenient plea of reform, would have diffused general satisfaction, and have contributed essentially to the public welfare. It is certainly to be lamented, that Mr. Fox should have suffered suggestions and considerations, unworthy of his high character, to prevail over his mind in a concern of so much importance, and which not only affected the particular interests of his own country, but those of other nations; since it is far from being an idle conjecture, that had the turbulent and revolutionary spirits been deprived of the countenance which they obtained from his name and declarations, much of the misery that afflicted the world, and left an indelible stain upon the history of Europe, would have been prevented.

## CHAPTER XXII.

*Hostile Proceedings of the French Republicans.—Progress of Sedition in England.—Good Effects of the Loyal Association.—That Institution calumniated by the factious.—Meeting of the Whig Club.—Parliament convened.—Debates on the Address.—Speeches of Mr. Sheridan.—Motion of Mr. Fox to send an Ambassador to France.—Observation of Mr. Sheridan on the treatment of Louis XVI.—Conflict with Mr. Burke.—Friends to the Liberty of the Press.—Address on the War.—Motion relative to seditious Practices.—Debates on the Traiterous Correspondence Bill.—Lord Auckland's Memorial to the States-General.—Parliamentary Reform.—Board of Agriculture.—Prosecution of Mr. Hastings.*

NOTWITHSTANDING the pacific professions held out by the French National Assembly, and the pretence that the object of the revolution was confined solely to the correction of abuses in the government, and the establishment of a liberal system, friendly to all the surrounding powers, it soon appeared that the whole was a mask of affected moderation, to cover, till it could be conveniently developed, a scheme of boundless ambition and unprincipled rapacity. While the voice of peace was in the mouths of these republicans, the most virulent designs against the independence of other states were forming in their

hearts, and hatching in their secret councils. Of their hostile disposition, they gave demonstrative evidence in holding open intercourse with the disaffected and seditious of different countries, who made no scruple of publicly avowing their affiliation, for the purpose of regenerating their respective governments after the fashion of revolutionary France.

The deputies from factious clubs in England, Holland, and Flanders, were received with such glaring marks of distinction, as to manifest, beyond all doubt, either a wish to provoke the sovereign authority in those states, or an intention to foment a general insurrection throughout Europe. Yet, in the midst of a blaze of light, issuing from this destructive volcano, such was the infatuation of prejudice, and the pride of party, that they who had hitherto zealously advocated the new order of things in France, thought it incumbent upon them to justify it even when the National Assembly presumed to legislate for the human race, and to become a centre or rallying point for the anarchists of all lands. It was, however, a favourite maxim with the ruling faction there, that war was necessary to amuse the people, to pay the troops, and to recruit the finances. As good faith and morality had no longer any influence in their counsels, a regard to justice in the selection of their object was totally out of the question; and without paying the least attention

to the accustomed forms of civilized nations in so momentous a concern, they proceeded to declare war upon Austria, though in so doing it was obvious that other powers must unavoidably be brought to bear a part in the conflict. But of this the aggressors were fully aware; and so far from dreading the extension of hostilities, they provoked and gloried in it as the anticipation of universal revolution. Such indeed was the miserable delusion effected by these political jugglers, such the besotted fatuity of the nation, and the total want of honourable feeling for the public character, that the resolution of the assembly was received with exultation, as if it had been a blessing conferred upon the people. Unfortunately, neither the state immediately assailed by these furious democrats, nor the others whose interests were involved in the contest, had duly estimated the revolutionary principle as acting in the organization of the most tremendous elements of war, and consequently were ill prepared to resist the impulse of an engine made up of the fierce passions of an immense population. Still, when the flame was actually kindled, when the republican leaders proclaimed a sweeping avowal of their designs upon Holland, and of their expectation of support from the efforts of the English patriots, the admiration of French politics was carried to a shameful excess; and societies for the propagation of the new doctrines continued to multiply.



All this was nothing more than an exact imitation of the revolutionary system, for the clubs of Paris gave a tone and language to the corresponding institutions in the remotest provinces; and in addition to these numerous instruments of active sedition, the press was employed to poison the public mind, and to keep it in a constant state of inflammation. The same course was pursued in England, where the means of mischief, from the latitude afforded to the diffusion of political and religious opinions, gave an advantage to artful demagogues, of which they did not fail to profit, by circulating appeals to the people on the equalization of rights, and the reform of public abuses.

Such was the heavy and portentous appearance of things at the close of this year, when a small body of private gentlemen, totally unconnected with government, became alarmed at the magnitude of the danger, and astonished at the apathy with which it seemed to be contemplated, though every day gave convincing proof that the pestilence was working its baneful course to the destruction of those principles of sacred duty which alone constitute the vital security of a state.

To preserve public and private happiness, by counteracting the contagion, which was then preying like a canker upon the ligaments of society, an association was formed at the instance of Mr. John Reeves, an eminent counsellor, and well-known by his various publications on the

laws of his country and other subjects. This society, which met at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, was quickly enlarged by subscribers in the metropolis, and gave an example that was followed shortly after in the establishment of similar institutions throughout the kingdom. The simple object of these loyal associations was merely to correct the evil produced by seditious publications; and the means adopted for this purpose consisted solely in employing the press for the circulation of truth, with the same activity that it had of late been prostituted in the propagation of falsehood. As talents of various descriptions were thus brought into combined exertion, and the funds supplied were judiciously directed in the printing of numerous editions of cheap tracts, the good effects of the scheme soon became apparent, by the decided turn which the public sentiment took against the adoption of revolutionary doctrines, and the horror generally excited against the crimes to which they invariably lead. It was not in the nature of things that an association formed on such grounds, and acting with so much energy, could pass without experiencing much abuse, and having its real character misrepresented. They who were engaged in pulling down what this society thought it their bounden duty to defend, were enraged at the vigilance employed in countermining the work of sedition; and no language was deemed too contumelious for the institution and its members. Yet it was passing strange and

unaccountable, that public men, who boasted their zeal for individual liberty, for the right of discussing political subjects, and for the unlimited freedom of the press, should, at such a period, pour obloquy upon a particular class of persons, whose only offence lay in assuming that privilege which their calumniators claimed for themselves. While the friends of the people, the constitutional society, and other bodies of a like character, were eulogized on account of their principles, and recommended as models deserving of imitation for disseminating with great zeal one set of political opinions, the loyal association was reprobated and held up as an object of execration, and even prosecution, for presuming to combat those opinions, and endeavouring to shew their pernicious tendency. Now, whatever may be thought of the productions of this institution, whether the witty were dull in point, or the serious were deficient in argument, it cannot be said that, like its rivals, the society was indefinite in its objects, covering with the grave mantle of reform designs, of which no idea could be formed from the specious professions with which they were disguised. At a meeting, however, of the Whig Club, on the fourth of December, the loyal association was strongly censured by Mr. Fox, in an elaborate exposition of his political principles; and he took the earliest opportunity after the opening of parliament to bestow the most marked contempt upon the

society and its chairman. Mr. Fox concluded his speech at the club by proposing the health of Mr. Sheridan, as "the steady opposer of the excise laws, and may it ever be the task of genius to combat its everlasting enemy, despotism." This compliment, as a matter of course, drew a short but elegant reply from Mr. Sheridan, who observed, that the times demanded of every public man to speak out; and that, for his part, he acquiesced in the whole declaration of his right honourable friend, which being the triumph of wisdom and principle, the effect of it on the public mind must be equal to its impression on the club.

On the thirteenth of the same month parliament met, in consequence of the calling out of the militia, owing to the riotous disposition manifested in some parts of the kingdom, and the alarming encroachments of France on the side of the Netherlands. These facts, being stated in the speech from the throne, were controverted with uncommon vehemence by Mr. Fox, who, availing himself of the usual privilege in considering the royal communication as nothing more than the language of ministers, roundly averred that the whole was a tissue of falsehood, and a libel on the people; that instead of the prevalence of seditious practices, a universal spirit of loyalty appeared throughout the country; that the only danger to be apprehended was from the associations for the preservation of order; and that as the French patriots were fighting



for liberty, he, for one, rejoiced in their success, and was dejected when they experienced a defeat.

Mr. Fox concluded by moving as an amendment to the address, a resolution that the house would enter into an immediate examination of the fact, stated in the speech from the throne, which motion was warily resisted by ministers, and some other members, particularly Mr. Windham, who, after expressing his concern at being compelled from a sense of duty to take part in opposition to those with whom he had been accustomed to act, observed, that he was astonished to hear proofs demanded of danger and insurrection, when there was not a member within those walls who was not satisfied, from his own observation, that the British nation was never in greater peril. The surface might bear the appearance of tranquillity, but beneath, all was tumult and confusion. "Facts were called for," said Mr. Windham; "but he saw not the necessity of them, when every man's observation convinced him of the danger. A system, first originating in this country with what was called a constitutional society, had been transplanted to France, where it soon so improved under the genius of that kingdom, as to be competent to all the blessed works which the world had since witnessed; and this improvement was now brought back again so perfectly organized in all its parts, as to be deemed capable of effecting similar achievements among ourselves."

The amendment was supported at some length by Mr. Sheridan, who, in noticing the declarations of loyalty which had been made on every side, observed, that he believed there never existed a constitution so dear to the generality of the people. So strong was this persuasion in his mind, that if a convention were nominated by the free vote of every man in the country, for the purpose of framing a government, he was firmly convinced they would express no other wish than for the constitution, which had been transmitted to them by the virtue of their ancestors, and would retain the form, the substance, and the principles of it unaltered. Yet he trusted that there existed in this country a determined set of men, who would not suffer the errors and abuses of the constitution to be held as sacred as the constitution itself. The imputation contained in the speech, and to which he regretted that his honourable friend Mr. Windham had subscribed, he considered as highly unjust. It was in reality a bill of indictment preferred by the crown against the loyalty of the people. The bill, however, was not a true one; and if there really were any seditious persons in this country, who wished to overturn the constitution, their numbers were as small as their designs were detestable. But ministers, he said, had themselves created the alarm, and therefore it was the duty of that house, before they proceeded any farther, to go into an enquiry respecting the cir-

cumstances which were alleged as the ground of apprehension. Having insinuated that the plot was a fabrication to answer the purposes of government, Mr. Sheridan proceeded to treat with ridicule the addresses to the French convention from the clubs of this country; and in the same spirit he represented the riots which had taken place at Dundee, and other parts of the kingdom, as too contemptible for serious notice. In conclusion, he said, that as to the question of war, he would vote the impeachment of that minister who should enter into it, for the purpose of re-establishing the former despotism of France; who should dare, in such a cause, to spend a single guinea, or spill one drop of English blood. A war at that moment, he contended, ought only to be undertaken on the ground of the most inevitable necessity. He did not consider the opening of the Scheldt as sufficient to justify hostilities, nor did he believe that the Dutch themselves would, on this account, solicit our interference, unless they had previously received instructions from hence for that purpose.

Mr. Burke, in defending the address and measures of government, took particular notice of the assertion of Mr. Sheridan, that there were no insurrections or plots in the country; and that the declaration from the throne, in this point, was a gross libel and calumny on the nation. "But," said Mr. Burke, "it was no such thing; for with

the same justice, Cicero might have been charged with libelling all Rome, when he denounced the conspiracy of Catiline and his companions, and exposed their intention to burn the city, and massacre the senate. Instead of charging the people with the crime, they were called upon to suppress it ; they were called upon to guard against that French liberty with which some men were infatuated ; a liberty which was in fact the most nefarious tyranny ; a liberty which neither secured persons nor property ; a liberty which had destroyed one Bastille, and erected thousands ; which had turned every man's house into a Bastille ; which had destroyed all rank, all order, all subordination, all religion, and all society." The amendment was negatived by a majority of two hundred and forty to fifty ; notwithstanding which, Mr. Fox, on the following day, moved another, expressive of the great concern the house felt at the probable interruption of tranquillity ; and strongly recommending, if it were yet possible, that every species of negociation should be employed, to prevent the calamities of war, consistent with the honour and dignity of the British nation.

In urging this measure, Mr. Fox took occasion to express his sentiments on the melancholy situation of the unfortunate King of France, whose fate was at that time certainly decided by the miscreants then in possession of the sovereign power, which they had usurped under the pretext



of establishing a perfect republic. But the language of the English orator, though pathetic and indignant, on the injustice and impolicy of the conduct pursued by the French regicides, was strangely equivocal, and such as might have been easily converted into a palliative rather than a censure. Having mentioned the treaties entered into with Cromwell and the English commonwealth, he said, "Did not foreign courts vie in their civilities to our new government, after the execution of Charles the first; an execution, whatever difference of opinion there might be entertained about it, that had infinitely less injustice in it than the one which might perhaps be inflicted on the unhappy sovereign of France: but he hoped so foul a deed would not be perpetrated." Mr. Fox added, that he should consider such an act as one that would for ever be a disgrace to that nation, and as one that every man must deplore: but still he could not think that we were never to have any connexion with France on that account.

By applying to the two most atrocious murders that disgrace the pages of modern history the softening term of execution, an advantage certainly was given to those who maintained the right of the people, to cashier their kings, and bring them to the block. It is painful to observe the difference in the language of Mr. Fox, when reprobating the conduct of the allies, and that which he used towards the inhuman persecutors of the virtuous

Louis, whose only error consisted in excessive lenity, and in an imprudent compliance with the demands of an unprincipled faction, calling themselves patriots. The word *execution* conveys an idea of something like legal authority and judicial proceedings : but in the instances to which it was now applied, there was nothing but an arbitrary assumption of power, and a pre-determination in the usurpers to doom to death, with the mockery of trial, the unhappy sovereigns whom they had hurled from their thrones.

Mr. Sheridan seconded this amendment, because, he observed, that, if adopted, it would still rescue the country from the evils of war. He accused administration with having been uniformly ignorant of the affairs of France : asserting, that, if it had been otherwise, they might have prevented the existing alarm, and have saved the life of the unfortunate king. Peace, if peace could be obtained, he wished by all means : but if it could not be preserved, he should vote for vigorous war ; not a war of shifts, and scraps of timid operation and protracted effort, but a war conducted with such energy as should evince to the world that the nation was fighting for its dearest and most invaluable privileges.

The motion, as might have been expected, fell to the ground : but Mr. Fox, with astonishing perseverance, brought it forward again the very next day, in a proposition for an address to His Majesty, requesting him to send an ambassador

to the provisional council of France, to negotiate with them concerning any subject that might be the cause of hostility. This motion was rejected without a division, after a very long and animated debate ; in the course of which, Mr. Sheridan repeated his former arguments on the impolicy of entering into a war, without any declared object ; and maintained that there was nothing in the conduct of France that could justify our interference, without, at least, making an effort to preserve tranquillity by negotiation.

Alluding to Mr. Burke and his friends, who were the most zealous in urging the necessity of the war, Mr. Sheridan was peculiarly pointed and ingenious. " Their declared object," he said, " was to revenge all the outrages which had been committed in France, to reinstate, if possible, all that had been overthrown, to exterminate the principles, and the people who preached the doctrines which the alarmists reprobated. As Philip demanded the orators of Athens to be delivered up to him, as his most formidable enemies, so these gentlemen would have all the democratic metaphysicians of France extirpated, or they could not rest quietly in their beds."

Mr. Sheridan concluded with a reference to what had fallen from Lord Sheffield, that he was ashamed of the enthusiasm he had once felt for Mr. Fox. This declaration he treated with the indignant zeal which friendship demanded. " The according

chorus of the noble band," he said, "who, in spite of the efforts of clamour and power, had surrounded the standard of the champion of the constitution, testified how little they valued the desertion of the noble lord."

These intemperate ebullitions and indignant recriminations between persons who had so recently been united in the same sentiments, sufficiently mark the heated temper of the times, and the contagious influence of political animosity. Mr. Fox and his friends, however, had not so much reason to complain of the harsh language with which they were treated, when it is considered that they had provoked the irritation, by their early, constant, and unqualified applauses of the French revolution. A more guarded conduct on their part, with respect to the tremendous scenes which were then passing on the continent, and a cautious forbearance in lending their support to new theories of government, before the practical efficacy of them was proved, would have allayed suspicion, and prevented much of that angry discussion, which contributed to extend the schism, and to render old friends more implacable than ancient enemies. They who saw nothing in the new state of things upon which to repose their hopes with confidence, nothing in short but what tended to create fearful expectation, might perhaps be too warm in condemning the innovation; but, at least, they had an excuse for their zeal, in a laudable abhorrence of



all changes effected by factious demagogues acting upon popular ignorance and fury. These persons regulated their judgment by a knowledge of human nature, and the lessons afforded by the history of all nations, in none of which did they ever find government overthrown, the laws abolished, and society reduced to its primary elements, without treachery, spoliation, murder, and impiety.

Every great moral event must be judged by its fruits, but unfortunately in the present instance the admirers of the French patriots did not act by that maxim of sound wisdom. They, on the contrary, decided *à priori*, and predicted a vintage of universal blessings at the first planting of the tree, without either knowing its real quality or the nature of the soil. In a short space the baneful effects appeared, blasting all that had acquired veneration by age or utility, by sacred authority, or human prescription; destroying the bonds of society, and rooting up the principles of moral obligation. It was, therefore, not a matter for wonder, that when the poison became diffused in the manner which had been predicted, the zealous alarmists, as they were stigmatised, should feel somewhat like resentment at the conduct of those who had inconsiderately aided the growth and spreading of the pestiferous tree by their public approbation; who had hailed it as the greatest blessing ever conferred upon mankind, and who augured

from its progress the establishment of a glorious era upon earth.

Mr. Fox and his associates were at length compelled to admit that the modern republicans, whose labours had elicited so much admiration, were both cruel and ambitious; that their treatment of the royal family was inhuman, and that their designs upon surrounding states required vigilance and resistance. When the fate of the king was no longer doubtful, even with those who had expressed the greatest confidence in the generosity and honour of the French nation, Mr. Sheridan gave his assent to the vote of supply for the navy, on which occasion he delivered these liberal sentiments: "He was convinced," he said, "that notwithstanding the gross and indiscriminate abuse thrown out against every human creature bearing the name of Frenchman, there yet existed in that country a sincere disposition to listen to and respect the opinion of the British nation. He alluded to the situation of the king, then on his trial, and of his family. He was confident that the French nation was ill-informed of the temper and feelings of the free but generous and humane people of Great Britain, and that if they could be, in any authentic manner, apprised of what he in his soul and conscience believed to be the genuine impression of the public mind on the subject, namely, that there was not one man of any descrip-

tion or party, who did not deprecate, and who would not deplore the fate of these persecuted and unfortunate victims, should the apprehended catastrophe take place, he was confident that such a conviction might produce a considerable influence, he wished he could venture to say a successful effect, on the public mind at Paris, and throughout France.

Mr. Sheridan having expressed his reasons for thinking thus, said, that among those whose hearts would be most revolted and disgusted by the unjust and inhuman act of cruelty alluded to, he believed would be found all those who had been foremost in rejoicing at the destruction of the old despotism of France, and who had eagerly hoped and expected, that to whatever extremes, as to principles of government, a momentary enthusiasm might lead a people, new to the light of freedom; that, however wild their theories might be, there would still have appeared in the quiet, deliberate acts of their conduct, those inseparable characteristics of true liberty, and of true valour, justice and magnanimity. He would not take upon him to give any opinion as to the manner in which the public sentiment of England might be expressed on this subject; but he was more and more convinced, from the latest intelligence, that the opportunity ought not to be neglected.

Though this declaration did honour to the feelings of Mr. Sheridan, what he observed of the

French character, and of the respect paid in that country to the sentiments of the English nation, betrayed an ignorance of the people, which could hardly have been expected in a person whose means of information enabled him to form a much more correct opinion on the subject. Mr. Burke was so far from being conciliated by the sympathy manifested in the speech, that he censured the language of it in severe terms, observing, in a sarcastic way, that "as he knew nothing of the gentlemen of the phalanx, he should leave them to themselves; but that as to the French, he could not rely, as the honourable gentleman who spoke last desired, on their justice, magnanimity, or mercy, particularly when they charged their king as a criminal for offences, for which that house would not call the meanest individual in the country to answer at their bar. But in truth, the king was in the custody of assassins, who were both his accusers and his judges, and his ruin was inevitable."

Upon this, Mr. Sheridan rose, and claimed the indulgence of the house, beyond the usual bounds of explanation. "So perverse a misrepresentation of any member's speech, accompanied by such unwarrantable insinuations," he said, "had perhaps never been heard within those walls. He would not attribute it to any ill purpose, or any ill motive, for he believed the right honourable gentleman's ill temper had so completely run away with



him, that he scarcely knew himself what he meant or what he had said."

Mr. Fox concurred in the sentiments expressed by his friend, respecting the cruel treatment of the royal family of France; and he gave it as his opinion, that the best mode of considering the subject would be to address His Majesty for a copy of the instructions sent to Earl Gower on recalling him from his embassy, and then, in a vote of thanks, to signify the abhorrence of the house at the transactions recently committed in that country. Mr. Pitt at first approved of the advice; but it was afterwards thought most prudent to decline a proceeding, which there was too much reason to believe would only have injured the illustrious persons it was intended to befriend. The sanguinary faction which then domineered at Paris had so little regard for the law of nations, or respect for this country, as at this very time to indulge the confident expectation of being able to plunge England into the same state of anarchy which prevailed in France.

With this view, numerous emissaries were sent over to assist the seditious clubs in various parts of the kingdom; and the correspondence between the aspiring republicans here, and their triumphant brethren on the continent, was carried on with so much activity, that an act of parliament was deemed necessary to lay aliens under particular restrictions. But though the urgency of the

measure was obvious to all who had eyes to see, and candour to confess the fact, the remaining members of the opposition would not suffer the bill to pass without resistance; and Mr. Sheridan, on bringing up the report, proposed to exempt ladies from its operations, which he said would not defeat the object of it, and would only shew that the age of chivalry was not gone in this country, whatever might have become of it any where else.

This pointed allusion to the celebrated passage in the *Reflections on the French Revolution*, where the author lamented the loss of the spirit of chivalry, naturally drew from Burke an observation, which was certainly not inferior in humour to the sarcastic attack. He said, that if the ladies would lay aside the modern spirit of chivalry, he should have no objection to an exemption in their favour, but that he feared such ladies as those who attended Dumourier, and other unbreeched heroes, were as dangerous as any of the persons against whom the alien bill was provided.

The murder of the King of France was followed in a few days by the suspension of intercourse between the two countries; and shortly afterwards war was actually declared by the republican regicides against England and Holland. It is now no longer a question with whom the aggression originated; for though at the time much obloquy was thrown upon the British government, as having provoked

hostilities which might have been prevented, indubitable evidence stands upon the records of history to prove that every attempt was made by Mr. Pitt to maintain neutrality. If, indeed, any blame be justly imputable to that illustrious statesman, it is on account of his tardiness in repelling the insults of the French convention, and omitting the opportunity of striking the blow with effect when it might have saved Holland, and proved beneficial even to France. Yet all that ministers gained by procrastination, and the endeavour to avoid war, was an accumulation of injuries, increasing insolence on the part of the new republic, want of confidence abroad, and unmerited reproach at home. It is not a little extraordinary and humiliating that Mr. Pitt suffered a load of abuse, for having actually pursued the very line of conduct which his calumniators charged him as criminal in having neglected. But it is still more extraordinary and painful to consider that such a man as Mr. Fox should, for the sake of popularity, and in a gloomy fit of disappointment, continue to assail his great antagonist as desirous of plunging the country into the evils of war, when he knew that every thing had been done to avert that calamity. To suppose that Mr. Fox was unacquainted with the real character of the republican leaders, and the pacific views of his own government, would be to arraign the perspicacity of his judgment; but, in truth, it was impossible that

he could have been ignorant either of the one or the other, for he had long been on the most intimate terms of confidential communion with Chauvelin, the French minister here, who, as he was directed by his employers, imparted all his secret instructions to the heads of the English opposition. Mr. Fox, therefore, must have known, and he actually did know, that it was the fixed resolution of the French republic to retain the command of the Scheldt, which would have been the ruin of Holland; and he also must have been apprized of the fact, that Chauvelin received orders of recal from his new masters, before his formal dismissal on the part of the secretary of state; nor could that great man be uninformed of the personal interviews between Mr. Pitt himself and Maret, afterwards the secretary of Buonaparte, who made him one of his dukes, in which conferences the English minister gave the most unequivocal demonstrations of his desire to avoid hostilities: and so firmly satisfied was the French agent of the sincerity of these professions, that in his official despatch he has this remarkable observation: "You may be assured that Mr. Pitt has a much greater dread of war than the opposition themselves."

Yet, in the very face of public evidence, and with much private information on the subject, Mr. Fox and his remaining adherents continued to accuse the English government with provoking a contest, which they averred to be not more



repugnant to the principles of sound policy and justice, than it was offensive to the wishes of the people, against whom it was waged. It was, however, a melancholy truth, that the French people were at this time in such a besotted state as to look upon war in the light of a blessing, and as being essentially necessary to the national glory. This bewitching delusion, so destructive of all moral principle, was artfully fomented by the great actors in the revolution, who saw in it the means of employment, and the source of riches for themselves and their numerous dependants.

Mr. Fox could not be so inattentive to passing events, or deceived by his imagination, as to have overlooked this conspicuous feature of vanity in the character of the French, and the advantage taken of it by their leaders; it was, therefore, unaccountable that amidst such glaring proofs of determined enmity to this country, he should persist in maintaining the practicability of inducing France to enter into terms of pacification. For this purpose he moved an amendment to the address on the notification of the French declaration of war; and though he was obliged to admit that some offensive measures had been adopted by the republic, injurious to us and our allies, yet he contended that satisfaction might be obtained by negociation, provided ministers were sincere in their professions.

This speech was replied to with great asperity.

by Mr. Burke, who went into a minute detail on the conduct of France towards other powers, and laid some stress on the estimation in which Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan were held at Paris, where, as he said, their healths had lately been drank with enthusiasm at a public dinner. The excessive vehemence and irregular flights of Burke laid him completely open to the attacks of an ingenious adversary; and never was castigation more severely or dexterously applied than in the answer of Sheridan, who said, that he was provoked to rise solely by the insinuations and charges brought against his right honourable friend. The reduction of the party attached to Mr. Fox, having been mentioned with an air of triumph, drew a keen retort upon Burke, of whom it was said that "his ridicule of the smallness of the number of friends, left to the object of his persecution, ill became him of all mankind: but, however small the number might be, there would ever be found among them men not afraid, upon such a subject, to oppose truth and temper to passion and declamation, however eloquently urged, or however clamorously applauded. They were not only called a phalanx by the right honourable gentleman, but he had styled the present motion a stratagem to keep together this phalanx of persons who had been otherwise endeavouring to make up for the smallness of their numbers, by the contrariety of their opinions. "This," observed

Mr. Sheridan, " was an odd description of a phalanx: but that appellation in reality would never have been given them, if the contrary had not been known to be the truth. Mr. Burke knew well their title to the character he had given them, and that a phalanx, whatever might be its extent, must consist of a united band, acting in a body, animated by one soul, and pursuing its object with identity of spirit and unity of effect. His right honourable friend's purpose then, in this amendment, must have been, as he had styled it himself, to reconcile those differences of opinion in other quarters to which he had expressly alluded, and not those which existed no where but in the imagination of the man who he believed had at last exhausted all power of splitting and dividing farther. But what could suggest to him that it must be a stratagem of his right honourable friend? Was he a man prone to stratagems? At any other time he would trust to the candour even of Mr. Burke for an answer; for if ever there was a man who disdained stratagems by nature, who knew how to distinguish between craft and wisdom, between crookedness and policy, who loved the straight path, and sometimes even without looking to the end, because it was straight, it was the very person now arraigned for craft and trick."

Into the immediate subject of the amendment, Mr. Sheridan did not profess to enter; but the impiety of the French having been painted, in

very glowing colours, by Mr. Burke, the representation was considered as furnishing a new cause of war, which now appeared to be a crusade for avenging the injury cast upon religion, by the avowal of atheism in France. "As an argument addressed to the feelings and passions of men," said Mr. Sheridan, "the honourable member had great advantages in dwelling upon this topic, because it was a subject on which those who disliked every thing that had the air of cant and profession, on the one hand, or of indifference on the other, found awkward to meddle with. Establishments, tests, and matters of that nature, were proper objects of political discussion in parliament; but not general charges of deism or atheism, such as those pressed on their consideration by the honourable gentleman. Thus much, however, he would say, and it was an opinion he had never changed or concealed, that, although no man can command his conviction, he had ever considered a deliberate disposition to make proselytes to infidelity as an unaccountable depravity of heart. Whoever attempted to pluck belief or prejudice on this subject, from the bosom of one man, woman, or child, committed a brutal outrage."

Having expressed himself in this judicious and liberal manner, he proceeded to vindicate, with more ingenuity than success, the revolution in France, from the charge of having generated a spirit of infidelity and atheism. "The philosophers," he



observed, “ had corrupted and perverted the minds of the people ; but when did the precepts or perversions of philosophy ever begin their effect on the root of the tree, and afterwards rise to the towering branches ? Were the common and ignorant people ever the first disciples of philosophy, and did they make proselytes of the higher and more enlightened orders ? On the contrary, it might be concluded, that the general atheism of France reflected no honour upon the exertions of the superior clergy against the philosophers ; and it was notorious, that all the men and women of fashion in that country, including possibly the entire body of emigrant nobility, were the genuine disciples of Voltaire and Rousseau, so that if the lower classes had been perverted to infidelity, it was by their precept and examples. The atheism, therefore, of the new system, as opposed to the piety of the old, was one of the weakest arguments that had been adduced in favour of this mad, political, and religious crusade.”

Though the general truth of this representation could not be called in question, as far as it related to the licentiousness of the nobility, and the negligence of the clergy, the position which it was intended to shake became stronger by the illustration ; for whatever might be the irreligion of the higher ranks, or the errors of the ecclesiastics, the fact remained incontrovertible, that the crimes of the revolution were only the natural conse-

quences of those principles, against the spreading of which it was the duty of every government to be upon its guard. Yet those principles had undoubtedly obtained high sanction in this country, and were defended as the vigorous improvement of the human intellect triumphing over superstition and despotism. Resistance to this moral contagion, however, did not constitute the ground of the war; nor in truth did Burke himself, who was the most ardent in exposing the danger to be apprehended from the progress of French philosophy, ever urge that as a reason for hostility. He saw indeed that all the enormities which defiled the new republic, and all its wild designs upon the security of other nations, issued from that corrupt source; and therefore, he warned England, and every European state, of the certain destruction which would fall upon them, if they suffered this gigantic power to attain that maturity of strength, which would enable it to carry into effect those projects of aggrandizement which were already openly avowed.

Mr. Sheridan, on the other hand, was unwilling to allow that the horrors which disfigured the revolution could be fairly traced to the principles of its leaders, or the corruption produced thereby in the manners of the people. With singular dexterity he endeavoured to shew, that the outrages in France arose out of the old despotic government; but was it, therefore, he asked, an infer-

ence, that those who had long been slaves should remain so for ever, because, in the first wildness and strangeness of liberty, they would probably dash their broken chains almost to the present injury of themselves and of all those who were near them? No: the lesson ought to be a tenfold terror of the despotism which had so profaned and changed the nature of social men, and a more jealous apprehension of withholding rights and liberty from our fellow creatures, because in so doing we risked and became responsible for the bitter consequences: for, after all, no precautions of fraud or of craft can suppress or alter this eternal truth, that liberty is the birth-right of man, and that whatever opposes his possession of it, is a sacrilegious usurpation.

Such declamation as this might be very well for a popular assembly, but it would be ridiculous to investigate seriously a mere rhetorical flourish, which only manifested the readiness of genius to cover the poverty of argument. The passage, however, is worth noting, as a proof to what wretched shifts the advocates of the French revolution were driven, when pressed by the glaring and accumulating evidence of the frightful consequences of that system which they so much applauded.

The despotism of the monarchical regimen was mildness itself, compared to the oppressive yoke of the republican liberty; and let the defects of

the old system be what they would, no one, without a palpable disregard to truth, could charge either the church or the state with the direct design of corrupting the morals of the people. This design, the men of the new school not only formed as part of their plan, but they made it a boast that their legislation extended to the total eradication of religious principles from the public mind. If it be said that they could not have succeeded in this detestable work, had the former government, and particularly the clergy, discharged their duty, the accusation of culpable neglect may be admitted, but the infinitely greater one of a murderous destruction of the principles of human happiness is retorted. Had the monarchical system been despotic to the degree with which it was charged, the philosophers, as they have been foolishly called, could not so easily have accomplished their abominable designs. It was the want of vigilance on the part of the government, and an excess of indulgence, that gave the dreadful advantage to the enemies of all order, of which they did not fail to profit; though it was to the ruin of their own country, and the annoyance of every other. Yet this wretched state of anarchy was called the triumph of liberty; and the miseries which it produced were palliated as the exuberance of unrestrained joy, at being delivered from the galling chains of slavery. In the same spirit, Mr. Sheridan gave notice of his inten-



tion to bring forward a motion, on the fourth of March, for an address to the throne, requesting communications respecting the existence of seditious practices in the country to be laid before a committee. To give greater solemnity to the business, and to obtain a full attendance, a call of the house was ordered on that day; but at the time when the motion should have come on in its course, Mr. Sheridan was absent, for which neglect Mr. Lambton apologised, by observing, that the honourable member, having been informed that the previous business would occupy two hours, did not think his presence would be so soon wanted. The house upon this excuse waited some time longer, and still Mr. Sheridan did not appear, on which Mr. Thornton moved an adjournment. This called up Mr. Fox, who owned that he could not justify the conduct of his friend, and therefore would make no opposition to the motion, though he wished, at the same time, that if this precedent of punctuality should be established, it might be extended to every person, let his situation be what it would. To this Sir Henry Houghton objected, by saying that an exception ought to be made in favour of ministers; but Mr. Pitt in some measure disclaimed the favour, appealing to the house whether he had ever failed in a punctual discharge of his duty during the present session, though he confessed that business of an unforeseen nature would sometimes occur to

prevent him and his colleagues from being so exact as they could wish.

This conversation was put an end to by the entrance of the person who had been the occasion of it, and who, in addition to the excuse offered by Mr. Lambton, observed, that he had been stopped on his way down to the house by upwards of fifty petitions, which had been put into his hands from the royal burghs of Scotland. Mr. Sheridan then proceeded to the subject of his motion, which had for its aim the appointment of a committee to enquire into the truth of the reports of sedition in the country. After saying, that in his conscience he believed the alarm had been spread for the wicked purpose of diverting the attention of the people, and leading them more effectually into a war, he begged leave to enter his protest in strong terms against placing implicit confidence in ministers, laying it down as an axiom, that to strengthen the hands of government was in all cases the weakening of the rights of the community. He then placed the object of his enquiry in three points of view: the first was, to consider whether the country had really been in danger; secondly, whether the danger was only ideal, or a deception practised upon government; and lastly, whether, as he contended, the whole was not a systematic plan laid by ministers to delude the nation, and to gain confidence in their measures. In either case, however, he contended,

that the only satisfactory mode of getting at the truth was by a committee of enquiry; in urging the necessity of which course, Mr. Sheridan displayed much wit, some argument, and more sophistry. But the whole scope of his reasoning and his raillery went to create a persuasion that the fears of sedition were merely ideal, and an artful contrivance of the government to impose upon national credulity. Mr. Windham and Mr. Burke were ridiculed in a very happy vein of irony, as panic stricken by these false alarms; the former now strengthening the hand of government, though, in the preceding session, he had, agreeable to the vulgar adage, rolled his majesty's ministers in the dirt, declaring, that he would pull off the mask of perfidy, and declaiming loudly against that implicit confidence which some had argued ought to be placed in them. Of Mr. Burke, to whose doctrines Mr. Windham had become a convert, it was said, that he had been so affected, as to see nothing but a black and clouded sky; a bleak opposition, where there was not a shrub or bush to shelter him from the gloomy aspect of public affairs; but now he had taken refuge in the ministerial gaberdine, where he hoped for security from the approaching storm. After sporting in this manner with the feelings and conduct of his old acquaintance, Mr. Sheridan accused ministers of wilful deception, in propagating false rumours of treasonable designs

in the country, for the double purpose of inflaming the people against the French republic, and of diverting their attention from the great question of parliamentary reform. Such an assertion was easy enough; but the evidences adduced in its support were of a most extraordinary description, consisting of miscellaneous reflections on the measures taken for the defence of the metropolis, the suppression of debating societies, where people went to purchase treason at sixpence a head, the establishment of the Sun, an evening newspaper, by some members of parliament, the proceedings of the Loyal Association against republicans and levellers, and Bishop Horsley's sermon, preached before the Lords on the thirtieth of January. Upon all these points, and several other incidental ones of a similar description, Mr. Sheridan dilated at great length, and with infinite humour, but certainly without substantiating his charge against the government, or removing the just grounds of apprehension occasioned by the progress of those pernicious principles which had already deluged the continent with blood. At the close of his speech, he adverted to the letter signed by Mr. Windham and others, addressed to the Whig Club, in which they signified their resignation as members of that society. This letter Mr. Sheridan represented as an effect of nothing but panic, for otherwise, a gentleman could never have thought of going such lengths in favour of



ministers whom he despised, and whom he could not trust, against a man whom he affected still to admire and respect. He never could have thought of withdrawing from a club because it had nobly resolved to resist calumny; and he called upon its remaining members to rally round the champion of liberty, against whom the shafts of obloquy were directed, but who, the more he was vilified, the dearer he must become to those generous friends who were attached to him for his virtues and his talents. Here the feelings of the orator transported him into some intemperate expressions, amounting to personal invective, and virulent abuse, which prudence must have condemned, and friendship could not excuse. Burke, in his reply, complained of this illiberality, and drew from it some inferences reflecting on the spirit of the party, for which he was attacked in turn by Sheridan, who charged him with having gone from the living whigs to the dead, quitting the camp as a deserter, and returning to it as a spy. "But, for his own part," Mr. Sheridan said, "that he had borrowed no manner of debate from new alliances, having never once departed from his original connexions and principles, a conduct which some gentlemen might not be very willing to hear stated, nor think entitled to any merit." As he was going on in this strain, the Speaker thought it time to interpose his authority, and to remind the testy orator, that the indulgence of the

house entitled him to reply only to such points as were immediately connected with the question. This correction was not taken in very good part, though it had the effect of shortening an altercation which did no more honour to the urbanity of Sheridan, than it reflected credit upon his judgment. His passion went off in a kind of splenetic retreat, equally uncourteous to his antagonists and the chair. "With respect to any harshness of language imputed to him," he said, "that no affectation of candour should ever induce him to spare persons whose conduct seemed studiously calculated to throw discredit on the principles he maintained, or the friends with whom he acted."

But the laudable eagerness which he felt to vindicate his own principles ought to have made him careful in avoiding illiberal reflections upon the motives of others. It was very natural that he should be tenderly alive to whatever affected his moral and political reputation; but the sensibility which he claimed as a justification of his conduct, in adhering inflexibly to one set of opinions, and the party professing them, would not have been less admired by his friends, or impressive upon the public, had it been tempered with moderation and generosity towards those who differed from him on points that were not merely speculative, but practical, in which, though he saw no danger, others beheld the seeds of incalculable mischief,

Here, once for all, it seems necessary to observe, that while Mr. Sheridan and his party complained of defection and want of confidence, they furnished their opponents with an unanswerable plea of excuse; for if caution and mildness were ever necessary in the discussion of political questions of dubious import, and untried consequence, such a course must have been peculiarly so where the matter at issue involved the existence of the state. They who saw danger in the progress of the new theories, and in the example of that country where only they had been carried effectually into operation upon a broad scale, were perfectly warranted in acting upon their fears, even though those fears might probably have been magnified to excess. But these apprehensions were not altogether imaginary, for an awful convulsion had recently occurred, through the operation of the very principles, which were the more to be dreaded, on account of the real or supposed countenance given to them in this country, by persons of great name and extensive influence. The admirers of the French revolution, as men of stronger nerves, might ridicule this alarm, and felicitate themselves upon the superior energy of their minds, and the inflexible steadiness of their sentiments, but they had no moral right to call in question the integrity of those whom they treated with contempt. Now if men are ever sincere at all, it certainly is in the expression of their fears;



and at that period, he who could say there was no cause for panic or precaution, had much more reason to clear himself from the charge of temerity, than to accuse others of the want of rectitude.

Yet such is the inconsistency of party spirit, the very persons who affected to despise the seceders from opposition, for being the dupes of false alarm, and to be indignant against those who created it, acted under similar impressions, or were the authors of a much grosser delusion.

When the friends of order and loyalty found it necessary to unite in the defence of the laws and government of the country, they who had set them an example, by forming combinations of a very dubious character, made a great outcry against such unconstitutional establishments. A meeting of persons, calling themselves "Friends to the Liberty of the Press," took place at the Free Masons' Tavern, soon after the meeting of parliament, when a string of resolutions was passed, in which great alarm was expressed, lest the loyal associations should destroy all freedom and patriotism. The obnoxious institutions were even accused of having broached doctrines subversive of the principles of the glorious revolution, and of course inimical to the rights of the Brunswick family to the British throne.

A second meeting of the same society was held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, in the Strand, on the nineteenth of January, at which the pre-



sent Lord Erskine presided, who read a long paper, ready prepared, on the common-place topics of freedom of discussion, and the trial by jury, for which he was complimented in a very handsome manner by Mr. Sheridan, at whose instance the speech of the chairman was adopted as the declaration of the Friends to the Freedom of the Press.

The harmony of this convivial assembly was, however, in great danger of being broken up, by the cynical conduct of Horne Tooke, who could rarely let slip an opportunity of throwing out some sarcastic observations upon the language of public men, even when he was leagued with them in pursuit of the same object. The chairman having said, that the part which gentlemen of rank were then taking, would lead to the acquisition of the first stations in the country. Tooke thought proper to censure the remark, as savouring more of selfishness and ambition than became true patriots, who ought always to act without any eye to employments in the state, lest the purity of their principles should be called in question. This pertinent reflection gave offence to Mr. Grey, who defended the president with uncommon warmth, and threw out so many insinuations against the political integrity of Tooke, as might have marred the good humour of the company, had not Sheridan interposed his pleasantry, and adroitly contrived to shift the subject. On

the ninth of March he took the chair; and among other resolutions passed at this meeting, was one for opening a subscription to support the injured rights of the press. But though books were opened for this purpose, and a pompous declaration was framed, to enforce the necessity of co-operating in the defence of liberty, no occasion offered for calling the resolutions of the society into effect. Their sacrifices were wholly of the festal kind, and their labours were fortunately confined to the display of impassioned eloquence against evils of which no trace could be found, either in the proceedings of government or the machinations of individuals.

The wit of Mr. Sheridan was called into play in the same harmless manner on the statement of the finances, the accuracy of which he admitted, but could not suffer the opportunity to escape without a stroke of humour. Mr. Pitt concluded his speech with saying, that he had heard of wars undertaken for the defence of the lawful succession; but that we were engaged in contending with those who sought the destruction of our constitution: upon which, his opponent observed, that this was an alarming appeal to the passions of the house; that the minister, in laying aside his pencil and slate for the truncheon, looked more like a general going to storm a French redoubt, than a sober accountant settling his arrears with the stewards of the people.

To secure the country from internal enemies, and thereby the more vigorously to prosecute the war abroad, a bill was brought into parliament for the prevention of all traitorous correspondence; the principal features of which act consisted in making it high treason to supply the French with stores, cash, or other necessities; and extending the same penalty to the purchase of lands in that country, or lending money to its inhabitants upon mortgage. It was farther made a misdemeanour to insure French ships, or for British subjects to go and reside abroad without a license. This bill was reprobated by Mr. Fox, as being repugnant to the principles of civil liberty, dangerous in its operation, and contrary to the interests of the nation: though at the same time it was generally known that the French agents were buying up not only goods, but even gold and silver, in this kingdom, with assignats, for the purpose of destroying us more effectually; and it was no less certain, that Englishmen of rank and property were so infatuated as to lay out their money in the purchase of confiscated estates in France, to the manifest ruin of their families, and the injury of their native country.

On the second reading of the bill, Mr. Sheridan made many pleasant observations on the hurry evinced by the Attorney-General, with whom the measure originated; and he endeavoured to turn into ridicule all that had been advanced by those



who advocated it on the score of necessity. He censured the act as tyrannical in its principal clauses; and he considered the whole as being little better than a libel upon the people of the country, who were hereby indicted of sedition. Mr. Pitt having justified the proceeding by referring to a similar act, passed in the reign of King William, when both whigs and tories concurred in its propriety, Mr. Sheridan remarked, that he did not know any person so well situated to prove a man may affect to be a whig, and yet be a tory in his heart: he did not know a man who had greater reason to feel what he said upon that subject, or to understand it better. However, after allowing this to the minister, he believed that, if the right honourable gentleman meant any thing by what he said on that subject, he meant to convey a sentiment, and establish a doctrine, the most pernicious to all liberty, namely, that public profession of principles is altogether a piece of delusion upon the people of this country. In doing this, the minister was actuated by the desire of bringing all public spirit into contempt, of destroying all distinction between the friends of freedom and the friends of despotism, for the purpose of building his own power upon the ruins of both: but, added Mr. Sheridan, whatever the minister might think, there was too much good sense in the nation to be imposed upon by such stale attempts. He concluded with saying, that



ministers, seeing the story of sedition and the trade of alarmists beginning to flag, had artfully brought in the present bill to revive the delusion.

To the coarse illiberality of this ribald speech, and the base insinuation against his sincerity, Mr. Pitt replied with becoming spirit, observing, that the number of the disaffected in the country was not so much the consideration of government, as the duty of guarding against an increase, by preventing, as much as possible, the propagation of certain principles, which, if carried to their full extent, would place this country in a much worse situation than that of the revolution. With respect to Mr. Sheridan's observation about whigs and tories, he said, that if any abandonment of public principle was thereby ascribed to him, he disdained the imputation. He then insisted, that he did not hold the principles of some persons, who had lately called themselves whigs, but the principles of liberty established at the revolution.

The reply of Sheridan was certainly not very gracious, but finding himself gruelled for argument, he attempted to make up for it by a joke, and in this he succeeded. He said, that whether the right honourable gentleman disdained the imputation, he did not care, only the more disdain he expressed, the more he was convinced that the point had been rightly put. The minister had said he was not one of the living whigs, or those who lately called themselves by that name. To be sure,

he did not mention any living whigs, and therefore it was likely that he had alluded to some dead ones ; “ but I wish,” concluded the facetious orator, “ that he would take some of our whig principles from us, instead of whig members.”

On the following day, when the business again came under consideration in a committee, Mr. Sheridan followed Burke, who had defended the bill with his wonted eloquence, and not without making some strong allusions to the connexion then subsisting between certain persons in this country and the leading men in the French republic, for the purpose of effecting a similar revolution here to that which had already been productive of such terrible consequences. Sheridan in his speech was pointedly and personally severe upon his old acquaintance ; and having noticed the assertion just mentioned, he said, “ I now challenge him to name those persons when he pleases ; for painful as these observations are for me to make, I must repeat to the right honourable gentleman, that I expect to hear his list of names, and his proofs :— but then, let me tell him, what sort of proof I shall require of him. I mean not to be satisfied with the right honourable gentleman’s reiterating his charges vaguely, or even of his naming any particular men, and calling them traitors ; because every body knew the facility with which that could be done. Nor do I mean to say that I shall be contented with hearing general assertions of our dan-

ger. I shall expect to hear the right honourable gentleman mention the names of the conspirators, and what measures they have taken to manifest their intentions, and consequently to justify the black appellation of traitors, with which they have been loaded." Mr. Sheridan, on a subsequent day, repeated this challenge in direct terms, which evidently implied that he considered the charge as directed against himself. Mr. Burke admitted his having said that the French had endeavoured to create a faction in this country, and that they had to a certain degree succeeded; but that he did not know any persons who had been guilty of overt acts against the constitution; if he had, he was too well persuaded of his duty to neglect giving the proper information before a magistrate, in order that such offenders might be brought to justice.

It is easy to see that this explanation did not go to the length of confessing an error, or of exculpating some of the admirers of the French revolution, from the charge of having kept up an improper correspondence. Here, however, the altercation ended, and Sheridan did not think it proper to press the demand any farther, contenting himself with saying, very coolly, that as Burke had abandoned what he had advanced on the existence of a traiterous faction in the country, he did not wish to pin him down to his expression, and should therefore take no farther notice of the subject.

However prudent this resolution might be, it



certainly was not the effect of any recantation on the part of Burke, whose language was very different from that of an abandonment of any thing which he had said respecting an intercourse between the two factions to promote a common object.

That Mr. Sheridan had any alliance with such turbulent characters, or was in the least privy to their designs, cannot be supposed for a moment; but when he was so zealous in defending some of the most furious democrats in this country, and ready on all occasions to justify the new order of things in France, it was far from being uncharitable to estimate his practice by his declarations. His bitter enmity to Pitt, and unforgiving resentment against Burke, appear to have transported him into a much greater heat of expression than could be called for by any difference on political subjects; it was therefore unreasonable in him to complain of misrepresentation, who in every debate was forward in calumniating the motives of his opponents. On many occasions, indeed, he was happy in turning their arguments and illustrations against themselves, of which an instance occurred in this speech; for Burke, having defended the bill against traitorous correspondence, by adducing an old statute, making it a capital offence for a number of persons to go about with blacked faces, Sheridan observed that this act did not pass without proof that people had frequently so disguised themselves for the



most mischievous purposes. Then proceeding to notice the extravagant flight committed a little before by Mr. Burke, in throwing a dagger on the floor as the expressive emblem of French fraternization, Mr. Sheridan remarked, "I am far from saying that a man should never make use of any art in support of his virtuous intentions. If any person carries a hidden dagger for the purpose of assassination, he is amenable to the law ; but if he only brings it with him concealed, and makes use of it for the purpose of heightening the effect of an oratorical attitude in the delivery of a sublime speech, he certainly is not."

With equal ability, though marked by a virulent animosity of application to the minister, he commented on the saying of Burke, that "were he Cæsar, he would rather yield to Brutus, than to the monarch of Persia." Upon this, Sheridan observed that the situation of this country was not so bad as to justify the apprehension of danger from the disputes of individuals ; but that there might be much in placing such confidence in any one, as to be blind to the tendency of his measures, and suffering him to proceed without opposing them ; for when Hannibal penetrated Italy, and arrived at the gates of Rome itself, notwithstanding all the devastation he made, Rome remained. After the Romans were attacked, and the city had been spoliated by the Gauls, Rome recovered ; but after Cæsar had usurped the dominion, it never did ; nor

should he think this country safe, if any man in it, whatever might be his station, should be suffered to proceed proudly, haughtily, and arrogantly, as if he were above the law ; and should afterwards, by raising a false alarm among the people, and saying that the constitution was in danger from traitors, ultimately carry his object in the establishment of despotic power.

It is not a little remarkable, that while Mr. Sheridan inveighed so vehemently against this measure, as being tyrannical and unjust in every part, equally injurious to the rights of the people, and disgraceful to the country, he should have recommended the extension of it to Ireland. This, however, he did in a very sensible manner, on the solid principle that the two kingdoms ought to act in perfect unison, and that otherwise England could not reap the benefit which was expected from the bill in question. Such an admission at that moment, and the suggestion connected with it, would seem to indicate that, after all the vehemence of his oratory against the measure, he was secretly convinced of its absolute necessity.

About this time Mr. Sheridan had occasion to give ample scope to his extraordinary powers as a public speaker in a motion on the conduct of Lord Auckland, our ambassador at the Hague, who had concurred with Count Stahrenberg, the Austrian minister there, in presenting a memorial to the states-general, requesting that none of the French

convention, or the members of the executive council of that country, should be permitted to harbour in any part of the Dutch territories; and that with regard to the regicides, who were already there, they might be subjected to the sword of the law.

The rhetoric language of this memorial certainly laid it open to criticism, and the last-mentioned requisition was no doubt liable to misrepresentation; but upon the whole there was nothing in the proceeding itself that could be considered as repugnant to the law of nations, and even the demand upon which such a clamour was raised had its justification in the precedent set by the French republic, which, by its decrees, had proscribed all monarchy, and held out encouragement to universal rebellion. But such is the wayward spirit of party, while the opposition beheld this outrage with indifference, they affected to treat the memorial of the English and Austrian ambassadors as the violation of all national honour, and a call for assassination.

This harsh and unjust construction was put upon it by Mr. Sheridan, who delivered it as his opinion that the war was unnecessary, because the security of the country, and indemnification to Holland, might have been obtained by negociation. After expressing this confidence in the good faith of those with whom that negociation must have taken place, there could be little to wonder at in the colour given to the memorial of Lord Auckland, as amount-



ing to a proposition for the massacre of eight or nine millions of people. By putting it in this horrible light, and distorting a sentence, that, fairly interpreted, conveyed an unexceptionable meaning, eloquence gained much, but it was at the expense of candour, and to the injury of public justice. Both Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan laboured very hard to force the most offensive sense upon the passages which they selected from this state paper; and the latter exercised his genius with uncommon agility in pursuing the subject as connected with a system of spoliation similar to what had been practised in Poland. How such an idea could have entered into any human imagination, is hard to conceive, but it served the purpose of the orator, in enabling him to dilate at great length upon the inordinate ambition of the Empress Catherine; forgetting, mayhap, that to Mr. Fox and his party this very despot was indebted for the opportunity and the means of accomplishing the partition which they now so strongly reprobated. The language of Lord Auckland could not be more reprehensible than that of his censor, who, instead of confining his animadversions to the memorial, and bestowing an incidental remark upon the oppression of Poland, vented a general and coarse invective against royalty. Crowned heads, he thought, were at present led by some fatal infatuation, to degrade themselves, and injure mankind. But some, it seemed, regarded any atrocity in monarchs, as if it had lost its nature, in not being com-



mitted by low and vulgar agents. A head with a crown, and a head with a night-cap, totally altered the moral quality of actions : robbery was no longer robbery ; and death, inflicted by a hand wielding a pike or swaying a sceptre, was branded as murder, or regarded as innocent. This, Mr. Sheridan observed, was a fatal principle to mankind, and monstrous in the extreme. He had lamented early the change of political sentiments in this country, which indisposed Englishmen to the cause of liberty. The worst part of the revolution in France was that they had disgraced the cause they pretended to support ; however, none, he was persuaded, would deny that it was highly expedient to know the extent of our alliance with powers who had acted so recently in the manner he had represented. Having gone on for some time in this manner, the orator exhibited the crowned ladies and gentlemen of Europe as quarrelling among themselves about the partition of France, and the British minister interfering to effect a reconciliation, lest England should be worse off than by suffering that country to remain as she was. In the same sportive humour, and careless about the effect of the inflammatory sallies which his lively genius threw out, he even figured England herself as subjected to the same fate, whenever the confederates should find it convenient to make the experiment.

The extemporary effusions of parliamentary de-

claimers are not proper objects of critical discussion; and much allowance is necessarily due to erroneous conception, heat of temper, and the zeal of party; but when timely notice has been given of a motion, and when that motion not only involves a serious charge against a person high in office, but tends to affect the relations in which the country stands to foreign states, no such indulgence for intemperate severity or wanton levity can be fairly claimed or be justly granted. Wit in the debates of a national council may be very amusing to those who witness its immediate effects; but when it is recorded and published to the world, as constituting part of an argument gravely advanced upon a question of universal import, that which was nothing more than a flight of fancy, or an ebullition of pleasantry, may prove as mischievous to the public interests as injurious to private characters. So long as the proceedings of parliament were confined to their own journals, intemperate speeches could do little harm; but since the privilege of reporting them has become established by usage, and is carried to excess, the harangues of violent men, it is too much to be feared, have frequently wounded the peace of families, and had the most pernicious influence upon public opinion.

Had the motion of Mr. Sheridan for a vote of censure upon Lord Auckland succeeded, the feelings of that distinguished nobleman must have

suffered beyond the power of reparation; but, to the honour of the times, the opposition on this occasion could muster no more than thirty-six in the Commons; while, in the Lords, they were defeated by a resolution that the paper in question was conformable to the sentiments of His Majesty, and of both houses of parliament; and that it was consonant to those ideas of justice and policy which it became the honour and dignity of the nation to express.

How little the passing horrors in France were regarded as a warning by the lovers of change in this country, appeared in the number of petitions presented to the House of Commons at this time on the subject of a reform in parliament. One of these from Sheffield was rejected on account of its disrespectful language; but another from Glasgow, which was rendered remarkable by being just fifty yards in length, was received; and, with another, of a more general description, from the society of the friends of the people, with whom in fact all the rest originated, constituted the subject of a motion by Mr. Grey, for referring the same to the consideration of a committee.

There was nothing new or particularly striking in the reasoning adopted to recommend this measure, except the manner in which the time selected for it was vindicated. To common understandings, it must have appeared extraordinary, that while the blood of the King of France was yet warm



upon the scaffold, and when that unhappy country was exhibiting daily the dreadful effects of political innovation, under the specious pretext of reform, there should be men of talents and property so infatuated as to urge the necessity of a change in our own constitution. Yet Mr. Grey ventured to maintain that all danger from the example of France was removed, and that if there was really any ground for apprehension, lest some violent reformers here should run into extremities similar to what had occurred abroad, the only way to prevent them was by acceding to the present motion. Now, as the French revolution began exactly with the same promise, it was by no means unreasonable to dread a similar conclusion; and, at all events, common prudence would have dictated caution and hesitation at such an awful period, when the fury of anarchy was raging beyond any parallel. Mr. Pitt, in resisting the motion, allowed that he had on different occasions advocated the expediency of a reform in the representation of the House of Commons; but he acknowledged, with candour, that his sentiments on that subject were moderated by reflection and experience. Besides, the seasons which he had chosen for the discussion of this proposition were very different indeed from the turbulent era so strangely and improperly selected for the trial of experiments on our political system, when all our energies were required for its defence against those who



threatened its annihilation. Instead of allowing that there was no danger to be apprehended from the pernicious influence of French principles, he contended that the reverse was admitted by the arguments of the opposition themselves, who supported the motion, on the plea that it was necessary as a preventive measure against the evils of a revolution. This was, therefore, a sufficient justification of the persons who thought it unwise to begin, at such a critical moment, changes of which no man could foresee the end. They who were for trying the experiment, professed that without it some convulsion might ensue; but there was more hazard of such an event from the trial itself, than the neglect of it. The influence of French principles was at that time as active and potent as ever, of which abundant proofs appeared daily, in the circulation of cheap pamphlets among the lower classes, all tending to sow disaffection, and to recommend sedition; besides which, there were numerous societies continually rising, formed on the model, and holding communication with the jacobinical clubs of Paris. In France, the work of destruction began under the specious pretext of parliamentary reform; and it was observable that the same art was adopted in this country, at a time too when some of the political associations here made an open declaration in favour of the republican form of government, and held out a national convention as necessary to its establish-

ment. With regard to the petitions which had been presented to the house, it was shrewdly observed by the minister, that though they came from different places, they all bore the same family likeness, and were evidently of the same manufacture. These petitions, thus stamped with the characteristics of fraud, were therefore totally undeserving of the least attention; and as to the society out of whose labours they emanated, though it had now been formed above a-year, it had not made one convert in England, from whence Mr. Pitt inferred that the cause was far from being popular among the rational part of the community. After a variety of convincing arguments and strong representations on the perilous nature of such questions at that stormy period, the minister said that his own plan went to give vigour and stability to the ancient form of the constitution, and not to introduce into it any new principles. The merit of the British constitution was to be estimated, not by metaphysical ideas, not by vague theories, but by analysing it in practice: its benefits were confirmed by the sure and infallible test of experience. It was on this ground that the representation of the people, which must always be deemed a most valuable part of the constitution, rested in its present state, agreeable to what had ever been the practice in England from the earliest known period to that time, the number of electors having always been few in propor-

tion to the population. Speaking of his own plan, the minister observed, that his object had been to regulate the right of election by addition in some particular places, and by transferring the privilege in others, which was a very different thing from the idea of parliamentary reform in the general acceptance of the term, and as contrary to the scheme of Mr. Grey as the latter was to the constitution.

This speech made a deep impression upon the house, and Mr. Sheridan, who followed in the debate, did no more than justice when he characterized it as an extraordinary effort of the great and splendid talents of a noble and vigorous mind. He maintained, however, that the charge of inconsistency had not been removed by the explanation which Mr. Pitt gave of his conduct; and that, so far from meeting the subject with fair argument, he had found out numberless auxiliary evasions. In the course of this reply, which was, as usual, extremely desultory and rapid, Mr. Sheridan took notice of the reflection which had been thrown out upon the practice adopted of communicating between the different clubs, by the means of delegates, in imitation of what had taken place in France. How the right honourable gentleman came to be now so displeased with this medium of political intercourse, Mr. Sheridan said he could not conceive; but the fact reminded him of a circumstance that had happened on a former occasion, when himself and Mr. Pitt were both delegates,



and the Lord Mayor of London gave them the use of Guildhall for the purpose of transacting their business. Having thus endeavoured to vindicate a very suspicious proceeding by the authority of the minister, the orator laboured to shew that the objections to the proposed measure, on account of the pernicious influence of French principles, where wholly unfounded. Upon this part of the argument, however, nothing could be weaker than his reasoning, which amounted simply to an assertion, that the people of France, and those of England, were totally different: the one knew, and had enjoyed for a long time, a certain portion of liberty; the other had but just ousted their despotism; and therefore to refuse to enquire into the subject on that account was perfectly ridiculous. But here Mr. Sheridan either did not reflect, or chose to conceal the fact, that whatever might be the difference between the character of the two nations, there were numbers of a similar disposition on both sides, who concurred heartily in the desire to overturn all existing establishments, without any scruple about the means or the consequences. The period chosen for the agitation of this subject was very ominous; and, on all accounts, there was more in the proceeding to alarm even the friends of moderate reform, than to justify the conduct or the expectations of those who urged it forward with so much confidence. Mr. Sheridan, with all his address, was



driven to the necessity of defending the principle of the motion by the authority of the minister, and then exerting his powers of ridicule in charging him with apostacy. On the changes which had occurred in the political hemisphere, and the operation of pestilential doctrines, subversive of all government, he prudently declined making any observations; and, with equal discretion, he remained silent under the severe animadversions and cutting irony bestowed upon the society to which he belonged, and from whence the motion emanated. The conclusion of his speech was made up of a string of common-place invectives, on parliamentary corruption, and prognostications of decay and ruin to the British constitution, unless the remedy should be applied which was now offered; the object of which, he said, would be persevered in, until the reform was effectually accomplished. On a division, however, the motion was lost by a formidable majority: and though the measure has been since repeatedly renewed, on the same grounds, and with similar predictions, the constitution has neither lost its virtue, nor the country its strength.

This session was rendered remarkable by the institution of the Board of Agriculture, on the proposition for which, Mr. Sheridan moved, without success, that no part of the expense whatever attending the same should fall upon the public. In support of a national grant for this purpose, it was

strangely observed, that the rewards bestowed for improvements and inventions would be more dignified than if they came from a private fund. This, to be sure, was a very fallacious and awkward apology; but instead of shewing its absurdity by adducing the examples of the Royal Society, and of the Society for the encouragement of the Arts, Mr. Sheridan treated it sarcastically, remarking that it was the first time he had heard of its being a circumstance of degradation to pay rewards, which brought to his recollection two lines, expressing a very different sentiment, and extremely applicable to this country—

“ Let people look, or let people say,  
It always looks great to have something to pay.”

This unlucky couplet was, however, converted into an epigrammatic retort upon the orator himself in the papers of the ensuing day, where it was observed, that, upon the principle of his own quotation, Mr. Sheridan must be one of the greatest men in the world, as there were few persons who were more constantly in debt, and that to a considerable extent.

The subject of the protracted trial of Mr. Hastings came under discussion at the close of this session, on a motion of postponement, that the managers might have time to make their reply to the defence. As no small portion of blame had been cast upon the persons engaged in the prose-

cution, Mr. Sheridan took occasion to vindicate himself and his colleagues from the charge of delay; but he did this at the expense of the Lords, against whom he threw out many broad insinuations of procrastination and partiality. He said, that had the peers met from day to day, the managers would have been ready to do so, and thus the whole of the trial would have been over in one session of parliament, instead of lasting, as it had, for six years. But every one who has taken the pains to read the history of this monstrous impeachment, must be sensible that the gratuitous assumption of Mr. Sheridan was a mere flourish of oratory, intended to divert resentment, and to create prejudice. He knew very well that the Lords could not have despatched the trial within a shorter period than that which it actually occupied, while the managers claimed the right of making long harangues, and exerted themselves to the utmost in the examination and re-examination of witnesses. Had that august tribunal, indeed, suffered the prosecutors to take their own way in every thing, and put a restraint only upon the prisoner and his counsel, the case might have been otherwise; but even then, the appeals of individuals, and the national business, must have been suspended, to the detriment of many private families, and the incalculable injury of the public. It was natural enough that Mr. Sheridan should feel sore at the reflections which were openly



made upon the concern in which he was engaged; but he would have acted more judiciously in acknowledging the necessity of the delay from the magnitude of the prosecution, than in endeavouring to shift the odium to the judges, who certainly had no inducement to retard the proceedings. There was also much weakness and impolicy in bringing a serious charge against Dr. Markham, the late Archbishop of York, for having said, according to the report of a newspaper, that it was impossible to sit silent, and listen to the illiberal behaviour of the managers, who had examined a witness as if he was a pickpocket; and that if Marat, or Robespierre, were there, they could not have conducted the impeachment in a more scandalous manner. Upon the idle authority of a daily paper, did Mr. Sheridan think proper to bring up this notable observation before the House of Commons; and a few days afterwards Mr. Whitbread was weak enough to move an enquiry into the subject, in order to a public prosecution. This motion was warmly supported by Sheridan, on the ground that the words had come from too high an authority to be passed over in silence; but the house appeared to feel a different sentiment, and the question of adjournment, proposed by Mr. Dundas, was carried; soon after which, the session ended in a prorogation.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

*Melancholy Catastrophe of Richard Tickell.—Anecdotes of him, and of his Writings.—His Vanity and Extravagance.—Differences between him and Sheridan.—His Letter to Mr. Richardson.—Meeting of Parliament.—Remarkable Speech of Mr. Sheridan on the Address.—His extraordinary Motion for Papers to criminate Ministers.—His Dispute with Mr. Pitt.—State of the Navy.—Deception played upon Sheridan on the Condition of Halifax.—Case of Muir and Palmer.—Voluntary Aids for the Support of Government.—Singular Altercation between Burke and Sheridan.—Motion for taxing Placemen.—Humorous Retort of Mr. Rose.*

ON the fourth of November, 1793, the feelings of Mr. Sheridan received a severe shock, by the melancholy end of his old acquaintance and brother-in-law, Richard Tickell, who, in a fit of despondency, threw himself from the window of his apartment at Hampton-Court Palace, and was killed on the spot. This ingenious and good-natured, but thoughtless man, was a descendant of the secretary to Mr. Addison, and a native of Bath, where he inherited some small property, which, at an early period of his life, he squandered away on his pleasures. He had received an excellent education, and was bred to the law, but

never followed the profession, to which indeed he had, like his friend Sheridan, an unconquerable dislike, choosing rather to live by his wits in a precarious connexion with the booksellers, than to secure an honourable independence by a diligent application to study and business. But the violence of party in the American contest gave ample scope for the powers of Tickell; and as he luckily happened to take the side of government, some of his productions brought him acquainted with Mr. Brummell, private secretary to Lord North. This intimacy soon ripened into friendship, the sincerity of which was evinced on the part of Mr. Brummell, by his procuring for Tickell a pension of two hundred pounds a year, and a place in the Stamp Office. At the time when he obtained these favours from the crown, he was very much embarrassed in his circumstances, owing to habitual extravagance, and his being encumbered with a family of illegitimate children. By the advice of his steady and generous friend, he broke off this imprudent connexion, but not without settling a moiety of his pension upon the woman with whom he had cohabited, for the maintenance of herself and family. Soon after this release he married Miss Mary Linley, who brought him three children, and with whom he lived in great harmony, notwithstanding the eccentricity of his disposition, and the improvidence of his conduct.

On the eve of the meeting of parliament, in 1799, Mr. Tickell rendered considerable service to government, by publishing a pamphlet, called *ANTICIPATION*, in which he successfully imitated the language, and ridiculed the sentiments, of the leading members of opposition. For this performance he was soon after made one of the commissioners of the stamp duties, with a salary of five hundred pounds a-year; and he manifested his gratitude by continuing in a similar manner to defend ministers, and to annoy their adversaries, though not with equal effect, most of his subsequent pamphlets being imitations of that which had gained him so much profit and celebrity. In 1781 he brought out at Drury Lane a comic opera, in three acts, entituled “*The Carnival of Venice*,” which was got up with great splendour, and set off with all the advantages of scenic decoration and excellent music, the combined efforts of the Linley family; but no management could establish it on the stage, and it was barely tolerated through the season by an indulgent public. The same year Mr. Tickell adapted the “*Gentle Shepherd*” of Allan Ramsay to the taste of an English audience; but the principal merit of the alteration was due to his father-in-law, whose new accompaniments to the old Scotch airs were exceedingly beautiful. In cutting down the pastoral to an after-piece, the comic parts were so compressed as to be deprived of their native vivacity, while the long colloquies between

the lovers were preserved, though nothing could be more tedious, or less calculated for stage effect. Of the egregious vanity of poor Tickell, this trifling production afforded a notable instance; for though the credit of abridgment is of the smallest description, and the only new article added to the piece consisted of a song, the newspapers teemed from day to day with the most fulsome paragraphs of panegyric upon its beauty. In one journal, the after-piece was said to be “a pretty little phoenix, of two acts, rising out of the parent bird;” and in another it was observed that, “since the original poem was written, a bard could not be found at once capable and bold enough to touch the mantle of Allan; which task was reserved for the classical pen of Mr. Tickell.” Besides these ephemeral effusions, he published a few poems, characterized by a lively fancy, and harmonious versification. He was also one of the contributors to the probationary odes, a set of burlesque compositions, intended to ridicule the principal members and supporters of Mr. Pitt’s administration.

There seems to have been a strange affinity between Tickell and Sheridan, both being men of considerable genius, of ready wit, and convivial manners; but neither of them applied steadily to any direct object, nor paid the smallest regard to the common maxims of prudence in their private concerns. Each, however, saw those faults in the other which they had in common; and among their



respective friends they feelingly pointed out with severity that extravagance, and want of consideration, of which both were equally guilty. Sheridan very gravely and indignantly expressed his disapprobation of the volatility of Tickell, who, in his turn, was no less animated and moral in his observations on the irregular habits and inordinate vanity of Sheridan. Yet the former, with all his failings, had more moderate ideas than his relative, of which he gave a clear proof, in placing his daughter at a boarding-school, instead of suffering her to be bred up in a more fashionable way, under the immediate care of Sheridan, who resented the conduct of Tickell as an insult to himself and an injury to the child. Mr. Richardson, as their mutual friend, thought it his duty to remonstrate with the father upon the subject; and as the answer which he received is perfectly characteristic of the parties, and honourable to the feelings of the writer, no apology is necessary for its insertion in this place.

MY DEAR RICHARDSON,

Having received a letter from Sheridan on Tuesday, I answered it the same day; and conjecturing that it might not be pleasant to attend to my wishes, as opposed to his, I wrote in the fullest manner to himself, and therefore shall no farther trespass on you respecting the subject, than to offer those explanations, which my friendship and affection for you strongly urge me to

state, whenever I have the misfortune to meet with your disapprobation, as on the present occasion I fear I have, or you scarcely would have treated my former letter with a harshness which from you I think I have never deserved. You began your last with accusing me of inconsistency, in determining to bring Betty home. The plain answer is, I had made no such determination, but on the contrary had written to Miss Leigh to assure her of my esteem and regard, and of the satisfaction I have from my daughter's being under her care; though I acquainted her at the same time that she is to look to me alone for every expense incident to Betty's being with her. In this I have done exactly, as you remind me, I told you that I should, namely, placed her at a boarding-school. But you inferred, notwithstanding my having told you that plan, that because I waited for Sheridan's, I meant to leave the matter wholly to him. In the first place I waited only because he sent to acquaint me he had some plan, but which he never did send me; and I recollect the expressions which I then used conveyed my strong inclination to attend to his ideas on the subject, as I conceived they were sanctioned by Mrs. Sheridan; and certainly had these ideas gone to the contrary effect of my own, as being grounded on having thought that an education perfectly at home was more suitable to Betty's mind, I would have religiously observed that advice, and have

educated her entirely at home. But indeed you carried both my former and my late words beyond their meaning, in construing them to amount to any acquiescence in the idea of Betty's being confided to Sheridan's peculiar care, "placed under his auspices;" or to my agreeing to "his claim of being her guardian." All such renunciations of my own unalienable right, as a fond parent, I considered as totally out of the question; neither do I think that the loss of Mrs. Sheridan's protection involves a deficiency of maternal solicitude; for I never imagined that sending a child to school would argue her being deprived of maternal affection: on the contrary, I think that maternal affection may extend to Betty in such a situation, very effectually, by a constant, anxious, and minute observation of her improvement; by her occasional returns to us; by thus securing that she is done every justice to where she is placed; and by seeing and providing that she regularly profits by her education. I cannot, therefore, think that Betty is deprived of maternal affection; still less why, if she were so deprived, Sheridan's interference was necessary: for if the child is not to be at her father's house, but at a school, why on that account must her uncle place her there?—In writing to you, on this point, I certainly *wrote out*, as we both have *spoken out*, of Sheridan: I said then, as I must repeat it now, that I do not think Sheridan's habits (irregular and uncertain as they



are), nor his taste or judgment, on the subject of education, tally with mine. My principles for Betty's education lead not to any thing fantastic, nor to the training her up to the chance of a splendid connexion; but much more to give her plainness of mind, and simplicity, yet grace in her manner; in one word, to form her on the model of her mother, who (as you well know) could find her greatest happiness in domestic quiet, though instantly ready to appear with ease in the highest circles.—Now, I own, I have often regretted that Betty had a French attendant, and that she was imbibing ideas of elegance, from which a few accidents might lower her into unprepared dejection. You will again do me injustice, if you strain this apprehension into one unkind reflection on Mrs. Sheridan; but both she and Sheridan always proceeded in the confidence of realizing great expectations.

To Miss L. at a proper time, I shall explain my plans, which once again I must assure you, ere I close this intrusion on your time, are filled with a father's fondness, whose frame of mind may be as "incorrect," as you have thought proper to term it, and whose errors (known to you) may indeed have justified that severe stricture; but who, in this instance, if betrayed into warm expressions, has at least the sincerity of feeling to plead in excuse for them; and who, in venting the anxieties of perhaps too jealous an impulse to



the sympathizing tenderness of friendship, scarcely thought it would have produced reproach, and a total desertion of your promise to come to me.

Your's,

R. TICKELL.

The conduct of Tickell in this instance did no less credit to the correctness of his judgment than the sentiments expressed in this letter did to his paternal feelings. By adopting and acting upon the resolution of giving his daughter an education more suited to the level of ordinary life, than the plan of ornamental refinement recommended by Sheridan, he wisely secured the true interests of his child, and strengthened her mind against the vicissitudes of fortune. Not long after the death of his first wife, by whom he had two other children, Mr. Tickell married Miss Leigh, who is mentioned so respectfully in the preceding letter, and who deserved his esteem by her accomplishments and virtues. She was the daughter of a commander in the marine service of the East India Company; but it is to be regretted that her circumstances, which were rather narrow before this union, became much worse by that event, so that at the death of her husband she found herself involved with a young family in the greatest distress. The kindness of friends, however, administered consolation to the widow, and provided handsomely for the destitute orphans, who had, in

consequence, no other cause to lament their loss than the awful manner in which it occurred.

At the opening of parliament on the twenty-first of January, 1794, His Majesty took a brief but favourable view of the state of public affairs; and though it was admitted that the enemy had recently been fortunate enough to impede the progress of the allies on their frontier, that circumstance was accounted for by the system of confiscation adopted in France, and the arbitrary manner with which the republican rulers there disposed of persons as well as property. Hence the necessity of perseverance was contended for on the part of England, with a confident assurance of ultimate success, from the justice of the cause in which the nation was embarked, and the steady loyalty of the people, notwithstanding the continued efforts employed to mislead and seduce them.

The motion for the address was supported by Lord Mornington, the present Marquis Wellesley, in a long and brilliant speech, which had a great effect upon the House of Commons, as well as upon the public at large, by the very luminous view which it took of the origin of the war, and the indubitable evidences exhibited of the hostility of France against this country. His lordship adduced the authority of the factious leaders themselves for the fact that the new republic had entered into the war without any provocation; and

from thence it was justly inferred that, as the contest could not have been avoided consistently with the safety of the country, it was indispensibly necessary to persevere vigorously with it as the only means of reducing the revolutionary fury within the bounds of moderation, and thereby of ensuring a permanent and honourable peace.

To this elaborate speech Mr. Sheridan made a long and eloquent reply; but it is remarkable that the basis of his argument was the same as that which he had used twelve months before on a similar occasion, and expressed precisely in the very same words, though new facts had been now adduced to prove the inordinate ambition of the French republic, which were then unknown. Mr. Sheridan, however, still continued in the face of these evidences to vindicate France from the charge of having committed any act that could justify the apprehension of danger from her ambition or intrigues; and the testimonies which had been alleged to prove it, he affected to treat with ridicule, observing that the frenzy, folly, and rashness of individuals, had been employed to rouse the passions of the country, in order to second the views of those who were resolved to plunge the nation into war at all events. Having thus, in opposition to the declarations of the revolutionary leaders themselves, taken the accusation from its proper object, and turned it against the English government, he proceeded to account for the out-

rages which had taken place, by ascribing them, among other causes, to the hostility manifested by the monarchical states and the treaty of Pilnitz, though it was known to all the world that the most sanguinary scenes were perpetrated, while the surrounding powers were preserving perfect neutrality; and that to the treaty in question this country had never given the least sanction.

Mr. Sheridan was much more plausible and ingenious in maintaining, that let the character and conduct of the French have been ever so odious and offensive, prudence dictated to England the suspension of hostilities as a course of sound policy. "Laying aside," said he, "all question of aggression on the part of France, or of necessity on our part to enter into the war, all this done, it seems, to shew the house that the system now adopted by the government of that country is so abhorrent to the feelings of human nature, so contrary to the instinctive love of harmony and of social order implanted in the heart of man, so ruinous to external force, as well as to internal peace, prosperity, and happiness, that it cannot stand. This is the conclusion which the noble lord wishes to draw from all the facts and opinions that he has detailed. I close with him. I will admit his facts. I will admit that the system now prevalent in France is all that he has called it; and what ought to be our conclusion with respect to such a government? What, but that we ought



to leave to the actual workings of the discords which it is calculated to engender the task of its overthrow ; that if it will not stand of itself, it is not necessary for us to attack it. Without disputing any of his premises for the present, I will grant the noble lord, not only his principle, but the foundation upon which he builds it. I agree with him that it is contrary to the eternal and unalterable laws of nature, and to the decrees of the maker of man and of nations, that a government founded on, and maintained by injustice, rapine, murder, and atheism, can have a fixed endurance, or a permanent success ; that there are self-sown, in its own bosom, the seeds of its own inevitable dissolution. But if so, whence do we derive our mission to become the destroying angel to guide and hasten the anger of the Deity?—Who calls on us to offer, with more than mortal arrogance, the alliance of a mortal arm to the omnipotent, or to snatch the uplifted thunder from his hand, and point our erring aim at the devoted fabric which his original will had fated to fall and crumble in that ruin which it is not in the means of man to accelerate or prevent? I accede to him the piety of his principle : let him accede to me the justice of my conclusion ; or let him attend to experience, if not to reason : and must he not admit, that hitherto all the attempts of this apparently powerful, but certainly presumptuous crusade of vengeance, have appeared unfavoured by fortune and

by providence; that they have hitherto had no other effect than to strengthen the powers, to whet the rapacity, to harden the heart, to inflame the fury, and to augment the crimes of that government, and that people, whom we have rashly sworn to subdue, to chastise, and to reform?"

As a rhetorical effusion, this declamation claims great praise; but in point of argument and application, it is too imbecile for serious consideration. Neither communities, any more than individuals, are required to act as the avengers of insulted Providence; but it is the duty of both to guard against the inroads of those who have discarded the law of nature, and dissolved the common bonds of social confidence. If the orator really supposed that the disorder which raged in France would spend its fury in that unhappy country, and that there was no moral or political reason to oppose a barrier against its operation upon the rest of Europe, whatever credit might be given to the ardour of his imagination, and the generosity of his disposition, none could be justly awarded to his judgment, reading, or prudence.

That France had not only incited a war with this country, but madly rushed into it from design and for revolutionary purposes, was evinced by the confessions of the anarchists themselves, and the mutual recriminations between the Jacobins and Girondists in the national convention; yet Mr. Sheridan, with great confidence, and certainly with

ingenuity, laboured to convert even this fact into a proof that there was no one party, of whatever description in that country, which was not earnest to avoid a rupture with England, nor any party with whom she might not at that very time have reasonably treated for the termination of hostilities.

A bolder position could hardly have been advanced ; but the fallacy of it was so palpable as to refute at once all that it was intended to support : for if the conflicting parties in France had not been conscious of the truth, that the war was an aggression on their side, they would not have ventured to accuse each other with being the authors of it. At first none of them gave pacific counsel, or reprobated the cry for arming the French people against their neighbours ; but on the contrary, all the factious united in urging the nation into foreign war, and felicitated themselves as the advisers of it, when the measure was carried into effect. It was only when the pressure of the contest began to be severely felt, and the difficulties of war to multiply with disaster, that these ebullitions of resentment broke forth between the usurpers of authority in France ; when, or, in the metaphorical language of Mr. Sheridan, the charge of having instigated war was thundered from the mountain upon the valley, and re-echoed back by the valley against the mountain. Yet in defiance of these proofs of the hostile spirit of the French rulers, and while compelled to acknowledge the ferocity of their character, and the



lawlessness of their proceedings, the English orator continued to find an apology for them in the conduct of Great Britain towards the petty states of Europe. After throwing out such an ungrateful and unjust reflection upon his own country, it was not a matter to call for astonishment that Mr. Sheridan should be lavish in his praises of Washington for preserving neutrality amidst the intrigues and insolences of the French in America. But in thus allowing that the European republicans could not even leave their brethren on the other side of the Atlantic to remain in quietness, without attempting to subvert the government, the speaker, at one stroke, demolished all that he and his party had so obstinately maintained on the security offered to surrounding states by the revolution in France.

It was true that the American president did not think it prudent to make a national quarrel of the insult given to his authority by the French minister; and it was no less true that the Americans were profiting by the troubled situation of Europe; but then, on the other hand, these people were happily out of the reach of danger while England kept the dominion of the sea; and what was still more to the purpose, they were not in a condition to support a war, even had the French republic provoked them to it by a declared act of hostility. There was not the slightest analogy in the circumstances of England and America, and yet the example of a country separated from Europe by the ocean, un-



shackled by alliances, and perfectly safe from attack, was gravely adduced as an instance of magnanimity and moderation in monopolizing commerce, and availing herself of the advantages which we had abandoned. He must have been a very shallow politician that could find in such an allusion the least plea for the innoxious nature of French principles, or who could draw from it an accusation against the British government as having precipitated the country into a war which might have been easily avoided.

Mr. Sheridan was far more happy in commenting upon a passage, quoted from a pamphlet written by Condorcet, addressed to the English reformers, who were encouraged to perseverance, notwithstanding the smallness of their numbers, since, according to this great political calculator, revolutions will always be the work of the minority. It was the obvious meaning of the French philosopher, that a few able men, combining their talents with unanimity, and acting with energy, could accomplish the most extensive changes in any country; and in the British senate the observation was adduced as a reason for the necessity of checking the revolutionary spirit in its incipient state, and not to be lulled into security by the paucity or comparative obscurity of political innovators. Mr. Sheridan, however, chose to understand the recommendation in a sense very different from the original idea it was intended to convey, and thus, by reversing its mean-

ing, he turned the apprehension of danger it was calculated to create into ridicule. "If this position be true," said he, "that success depends rather upon exertion than numbers, it certainly is a most ominous thing for the enemies of reform in England; for if it holds true of necessity, that the minority still prevails in national contests, it must be a consequence that the smaller the minority, the more certain must be the success. In what a dreadful situation then must the noble lord be, and all the alarmists; for never, surely, was the minority so small, or so thin in number, as at that very time. But though conscious that M. Condorcet was mistaken," added Mr. Sheridan, "I am glad to find that we are terrible in proportion as we are few. I rejoice that the liberality of secession, which has thinned our ranks, has only served to make us more formidable. The alarmists will hear this with new apprehensions; they will, no doubt, return to us with the view of diminishing our force, and encumbering us with their alliance, in order to reduce us to total insignificance."

Returning then to his old position, that Great Britain was the unprovoked assailant of France, Mr. Sheridan went into the detail of circumstances to prove his assertion, but without adding any thing new on the subject, unless that part of his speech might be called so which represented the French as bearing all our insults and outrages with calm submission, and an earnest desire to remain

on terms of peace with this country, at the very time when their conduct evinced the utmost fury and pride against the rest of Europe. This last acknowledgment, which the force of truth alone could have drawn from the orator, was of itself a complete refutation of his diatribe on English ambition and French moderation; for no person, who rightly estimated the character of the two nations, and who observed with impartial attention what was passing on the continent, could believe for a moment that the revolutionary demagogues in France had the smallest inclination to maintain peace with England on any other terms than that of her remaining in a state of quiescence, while other states were falling a prey, one after another, into the jaws of this republican hydra. It was the fate of Mr. Sheridan, however, like most advocates of political paradoxes, to destroy his own arguments as fast as he uttered them; which was the case in the present instance, when he ventured to assert that England could have been secure in her tranquillity, commerce, and independence, by preserving amity with a people, who, according to his own account, were actuated by pride and fury against every European power besides. Had such counsel obtained influence enough at that period over the resolutions of parliament, or in controlling the will of the nation, it is easy to see, from what subsequently took place in regard to pacific states, that, though England might have remained longer



than others, it would only have been to increase the difficulty of resistance on her part, and to have given her the miserable consolation of being the last destroyed.

Mr. Sheridan, in this reply, displayed his talents with great brilliancy and ingenuity, but it was in a way that required little exertion of the judgment either in research or application, being nothing more than the flight of a lively imagination, roving from object to object, without investigating their real character, or deriving from them any practical result. Hence, he affirmed, that all our professed views in the war were already attained, and that the French would be glad to treat with us, or any of the allied powers, simply upon the principle of being left to the exercise of their own will within their own boundaries. Having hazarded this assumption, which certainly was at direct variance with what he had just before advanced on the infuriated disposition of France, Mr. Sheridan followed up the idea, by recommending it as an experiment worthy to be tried ; and observing, that if it failed, the war, on our part, would then be truly defensive and justifiable.

To the remark that peace could not be secure on the faith of treaties entered into with the fluctuating factions of the day, it was replied, that the time for negociation must ultimately come, unless the war was of an interminable description, or had the restoration of monarchy for its secret object. Here



the speaker was certainly much more fortunate in his reasoning than in any other part of his speech; and he placed the subject in a variety of lights, very well calculated to impose upon superficial minds, and to make it appear that the real design of the allied powers, and England in particular, was to re-establish the throne in France, as the only security for the peace of Europe. Mr. Sheridan next reviewed the actual state of the war, and contrasted, happily enough, the weakness incidental to a discordant coalition of powers, having different interests, with the strength of the new republic acting in a united and determined spirit. This, it must be allowed, gave great advantage to the advocate for pacific measures, and the more so as the opposite party had been driven to the necessity of accounting for the success of the French arms, and the magnitude of their exertions, by saying that such a state of things was too forced and unnatural to continue any length of time. There might be some reason in this observation, but it was so subtle and problematical as to wear the appearance of a miserable shift to get rid of an immediate difficulty, rather than the assurance of being able to triumph ultimately in the conflict. Mr. Sheridan saw the weakness of his adversary on this point, and he did not fail to seize the occasion in his reply, of expatiating with fluency of words and wit upon the opening which it afforded. "It has been remarked," said he, "that

if we had only the real resources and the real spirit of France to contend with, we should have conquered them long ago. It may be so; but the worst of it is, they will not suffer us to prescribe to them the sort of spirit, and the kind of resources we should chuse to contend with. This may be very unhandsome, but there is no remedy for it. They have, it is true, a great force, says the noble lord, but it has not a sound foundation. They have a full public treasury, but their prosperity is unsound. The people obey the government, but the ground of their suspicion is unsound; in short, he has taken great pains to prove that they ought not in reason or nature to make the stand they have hitherto maintained: and that they had no right to beat their enemies in the manner which they have done. Their government he has undertaken to demonstrate is not calculated to produce any such efforts. This brings to my recollection," said the facetious orator, "the story of a tradesman, who had a very admirable time-piece, made by a person who had neither learned the business, nor knew it mechanically or scientifically. A neighbouring clock-maker, exasperated at this intrusion of natural genius, took great pains to convince the owner that he ought to turn his time-piece out of doors. It was in vain that the man assured him it went, and struck truly; that he wound it up like other clocks; and that it told him the hour of the day precisely. The artist replied,

all this might be very true, and yet he could demonstrate that it had no right to go like other clocks, as it was not made upon sound principles. The contest ended in his cajoling the poor man to part with his time-piece, and to buy from him, at three times the cost, a clock that did not answer half as well. I wish," observed Sheridan, "that the noble lord would attempt to make a similar impression upon the French, and that he could prevail with them to listen to his arguments. I wish he could convince them that this revolutionary movement of their's, which, however unskilfully and unmethodically put together, appears so strangely to answer their purpose, is an unworthy jumble of ignorance and chance; and that they would be much better off in taking a regular constitution of his recommendation. If he could do this, I should think his rhetoric well employed, and our hopes of succeeding against them infinitely increased, otherwise his arguments and demonstrations on the subject are merely the waste of breath. Experience and facts contradict him, and we smart under the conviction."

It having been stated that the resources of France would be materially lessened by the declension of its foreign trade, Mr. Sheridan availed himself of the observation to glance a shaft at his old associate, Windham, who now occupied the treasury bench; and in the exuberance of his zeal had recently exclaimed, "Perish commerce, provided the con-

stitution lives." This notable axiom the orator affected to consider as the principle by which the republican practice was directed ; and whether it was imbibed from our commercial senate, or imported hither from abroad, the only result worthy of notice was, that though the neglect of commerce might have abridged the French of the luxuries of life, it had not hitherto curtailed the means of military preparation, or slackened the sinews of war.

Towards the close of his speech, Mr. Sheridan made some bitter allusions to the members who had seceded from the standard of opposition, and arranged themselves on the side of government. With a strange degree of inconsistency and contradiction, immediately after disavowing all intention of impeaching the purity of principle on which these persons acted, the orator inveighed with coarse irony against ministers, as procuring desertion, by holding out the temptation of honours and rewards. "I take it for granted," said he, "that they have been forced thus to look to the other side, because the nursery for statesmen, formed by the secretary of state opposite to them, has not yet reared a sufficient number of plants for the necessary consumption. I dare say, that though our Chiron is slow in his march, he will improve as he goes on ; and perhaps this year we shall be called upon for an additional sum of money to turn the nursery into a hot-bed."



Mr. Sheridan concluded with reprobating in strong language the inefficiency of our military and naval operations; but he declined moving an amendment to the address, leaving that proceeding to Mr. Fox, who, in advocating the necessity of immediate negotiation with the revolutionary government, observed, that a treaty with Robespierre and his associates would be as secure as that of Utrecht. The motion, however, was rejected by a majority of two hundred and eighteen; and it may well create surprise, that a division could have taken place upon it, at a time when France presented nothing but a frightful spectacle of anarchy, without any semblance of constituted authority, with whom even a truce could be concluded for twenty-four hours on an assurance that the conditions would be observed.

It would have been honourable to Mr. Sheridan and his friends, if they had reserved some of their pacific temper and urbanity for the direction of their conduct towards those who differed from them on a subject of so much moment as that of securing the national welfare. Prejudice itself must admit that both sides had that great object in view; and however wrong either party might have been in the course adopted to obtain it, virulent language, and charges of corrupt intentions, were not the most likely means of procuring credit to opposition. It is lamentable, indeed, to reflect, that while Mr. Fox and his adherents were into-

lerant against ministers, and those who supported them, they should on every occasion have been eager to palliate the massacres and proscription, committed in France as the natural effects of an abhorrence of despotism. When men were so ready to find an excuse for the crimes and outrages of a revolution, it would have been prudent in them to have spoken with moderation and liberality of the principles which guided others in forming a different opinion. Mr. Sheridan, on the contrary, who affected to see nothing in the conduct of the French factions but the levity and extravagance of men emancipated from slavery, and trampling upon their chains, had not one charitable sentiment for the integrity of his own government, or that of his former acquaintance, who thought it their duty at this perilous moment to give it their support. Too many proofs of this want of caution and candour are upon record; but a very striking one occurred within a few days after the opening of the present session, in his giving notice of a motion for papers on which to institute a charge against ministers; though at the same time, he was obliged to confess that he neither knew what the papers were, nor what matter of accusation he should be able to find in them. The motion, however, was made in a long string of resolutions; the object of which went to charge government with having purchased the support of several persons of high character and influence, by creating

appointments, or, as they were denominated, ministerial jobs. When the subject came under discussion, and no ground for accusation appeared, Mr. Sheridan was under the necessity of making the awkward apology, that he was actuated by no bad intentions against the parties implicated in his motion; on which, Mr. Pitt could no longer repress his feelings, but indignantly exclaimed: "Will the honourable gentleman persevere in his assertion, that he is only influenced by motives of good-will towards the individuals concerned? and if he does, can he imagine that any member in this house will credit it?" To this home-thrust, which struck the deeper by being the language of truth and sensibility, Sheridan was about to make a reply of equal asperity, when Fox interposed, and gave it as his opinion, founded, as he said, on experience, that his honourable friend had as much personal credit in that house as the minister. There might be prudence and policy in such a declaration, but it is impossible to believe that this great statesman could be sincere in his profession, because every day proved the contrary of what he advanced respecting the two characters. Sheridan himself, when his friend had finished this compliment, rose, and said he was glad that he had been prevented from making an instant reply, as he might have said something unpalatable; and he proceeded to observe: "Whether, if I repeat my assertion, any member of this house will doubt it

or not, I cannot be certain; but I believe it is in this house alone that the right honourable gentleman will venture to tell me so." Having thrown out this language of defiance, without making any explanation as to the cause of it, he sat down, while some gentlemen thought proper to reprehend personalities, as inconsistent with parliamentary dignity, and injurious to public business. In the course of the same month, Mr. Sheridan reproached the Admiralty with great severity, and in the most unqualified terms, for having exposed the trade of the country to the ravages of the enemy, by neglecting to provide proper convoys; and, among other things, he observed, that the French had taken as many ships from us as we had taken from them; which might well be the case, when the commerce of Britain extended over the globe, and that of France was nearly annihilated. In addition to this reason for the losses sustained on our part, it is necessary to state, in justification of government, that numbers of unprincipled adventurers fitted out ships, which they insured beyond their value, for the purpose of getting them captured, and defrauding the underwriters. Of this fact Mr. Sheridan could not have been aware; but it became him, nevertheless, when engaged on a subject of which he had no personal knowledge, to treat it with discretion, and a deference to professional men. The present Admiral Berkeley gave him a monition to that effect,



by recommending gentlemen to study nautical matters, before they attempted to speak on maritime affairs. The advice was good, but it was not well-taken by the person to whom it applied, who resented it with considerable warmth, and repeated his asseverations, that a criminal neglect existed on the part of government in providing for the protection of trade. With the same view, he brought forward a serious charge against ministers for leaving Halifax and the whole line of the American coast, where we possessed the most valuable colonies, in a defenceless condition. By eagerly adopting whatever reports came in his way, and omitting to make necessary enquiries before he undertook any complaint that was made to him, Mr. Sheridan frequently involved himself in embarrassing difficulties, and wasted both his own time and that of the public in needless enquiries. This was the case in the present instance, when, on the strength of a letter from an unknown correspondent at Falmouth, he ventured to accuse government of culpable negligence in regard to our remaining settlements in North America; and having given notice of a motion on the subject, wrote the following answer to his friendly adviser:

Sir,

I am much obliged by your communication respecting Halifax. I mentioned the subject in the house the first day in the session, and I since

find your intelligence confirmed in every particular. I shall be happy at all times to be favoured with any intelligence which you think may be made use of for the advantage of the country.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

R. B. SHERIDAN.

Lower Grosvenor Street,

January 29th.

(Directed) London, January 29th, 1794.

Mr. J. BLUETT,

Free.—R. B. SHERIDAN.

Falmouth.

This epistle went off in due course, and was taken out of the post-office at Falmouth by the only person of the name of Bluett in that place, who happened to be a young midshipman about fifteen years of age; and whose astonishment at its contents may easily be imagined. The letter was handed about the town, where it occasioned no little mirth, as it appeared evidently that the one sent to the honourable member was one of those Cornish hums which some wag at Falmouth had been in the habit of practising with success.

This account of the affair found its way into the daily papers, and excited some mirth at the expense of Mr. Sheridan, who could not avoid taking notice of the circumstance, on bringing forward his motion. Instead, however, of acknowledging that he had been made the dupe of his credulity, he affected to treat the whole as a mistake of his own,

committed in the hurry of an extensive correspondence. Having made this singular excuse for the blunder, he proceeded to assume credit from it, on the score of civility, diligence, and patriotism; commendable qualities it must be admitted, but such as would not have been less valuable, had they in this instance been blended with more discretion in seeking for facts, and temper in the application of them.

After the exposure of such an error, it was too much to expect confidence in assertions founded on anonymous letters, and the information of persons whose names were kept secret; yet, thus armed, did Mr. Sheridan venture to repeat his charge against government of culpable negligence in providing for the security of the colonies; but though the papers which he moved for were granted, he failed in his proofs, and the business ended with a long debate.

His talents were next employed on a subject which occupied much of the public attention, and produced great agitation among the opposition. The revolutionary spirit, excited by the convulsions which took place in France, seems to have spread with more violence in Scotland than in any other part of the kingdom; as at Edinburgh, a regular convention was established, on the true republican principle, and in perfect imitation of that at Paris. This assembly held communications with various societies, in all parts of the empire; and under the

pretext of associating to procure annual parliaments and universal suffrage, propagated doctrines subversive of all government. So barefaced and unequivocal were the proceedings of these northern reformers, that they appointed organized committees, established a fund, and acted in every way as if they were in possession of legal authority. The magistrates, however, were not idle or indifferent; and several of the leaders being taken up, were tried before the High Court of Justiciary for sedition. Among others who were thus apprehended, as persons of principal influence and the greatest activity, were Mr. Muir, an advocate, and the Reverend Thomas Fysche Palmer, a clergyman at Dundee.

These gentlemen having been convicted of the crime of leasing making, which, according to the old law of Scotland, signifies fomenting discord between the king and his people, were sentenced to transportation. With the view of revising this judgment, and getting it reversed before the Lords, Mr. William Adam the barrister moved the house for permission to bring in a bill, granting the right of appeal from the sentences of the Scotch judges to the House of Peers. This question, which was a general one, was discussed, with considerable ability, on the fourth of February; and the motion, as might have been expected, being lost by a great majority, Mr. Adam signified his intention of bringing the particular case of Muir and Palmer,



who were then in the hulks at Woolwich, under the consideration of the house in another form. For the same purpose, Mr. Sheridan, on the twenty-fourth of the same month, presented a petition from Mr. Palmer, stating that he was now suffering under an illegal judgment of the Court of Justiciary in Scotland, from which there was no appeal to any other court of justice, and praying such relief as to the wisdom of the house should seem meet. At first, Mr. Pitt objected to the reception of the petition, as an improper application to stay the execution of a legal sentence, when the regular mode of proceeding was by petition to the crown. Mr. Sheridan, however, removed this objection, by stating that the petition was not for mercy, but for redress against an unjust sentence. In consequence of this explanation, the petition was afterwards ordered to lie on the table; and on the tenth of March the question came fully before the house, upon the motion of Mr. Adam, to review these trials, by a production of the records. In this debate the learned mover endeavoured to shew that the offence laid in the indictment did not amount to leasing making, and that, if it did, the punishment by the law of Scotland was only banishment, which, according to his definition, was very different from transportation. The last distinction was certainly ingenious, but it could be considered as nothing better than a sophism; and in that light it was treated

by the lord advocate, who defended both the law of his country, and the conduct of the judges in this particular case, with great force and ability.

Mr. Sheridan replied to the learned lord in a speech of some length, throughout which he condemned the practice of the northern courts with great severity, and contended very strenuously that the words banishment and transportation in a legal sense were not synonymous. In his censure upon the Scotch judges, he expressed his wish that they would divest themselves of extravagant partiality, and evince some respect for the common law of England, and the common sense of every country. This surely was far from being the most judicious way of treating the general subject, and of recommending the particular case of the unfortunate gentlemen to the compassion of government. Invectives against an entire body of men for administering justice according to the established law of their country, and reflections upon them for not deviating in one instance from that code, out of complaisance to the statutes and practice of England, were neither liberal in themselves, nor calculated to serve the cause in which they were employed. The original motion was rejected, and the two convicts, who, by a little submission on their part, and a more moderate course of proceeding on that of their parliamentary friends, might probably have been pardoned, were sent to Botany Bay.

The splenetic spirit of opposition appeared very conspicuously at this period on two occasions; the one in a motion by Mr. Grey, to censure ministers for landing a body of Hessian troops in the Isle of Wight, and the other in questioning the legality of voluntary subscriptions for the support of the war. Neither of these proceedings was without precedent, and both were justified by constitutional right and necessity. The foreign soldiers were on their passage for a particular service, but being unavoidably detained, required landing to prevent sickness. This, however, was not deemed a sufficient reason, and the party contended that ministers should protect themselves by a bill of indemnity. Mr. Sheridan supported the proposition of Mr. Grey to this effect, with much energy, but it was negatived by a large majority; nor was his own motion, on the twenty-eighth of March, reprobating as unconstitutional the grant of any benevolence to the crown without the consent of parliament, at all more successful. In supporting this position, he endeavoured to prove these three points: first, that it was against the reason of things, and the primary principles of a mixed government, and of a representative system, consequently was not reconcileable with the spirit or letter of our constitution: secondly, that it was not consistent with the ancient and sound usages of the country, conformable to the best authorities, or to be reconciled with the custom of the king-



dom in good times : and, thirdly, that even if it was consistent with such usages, and countenanced by those authorities, it was yet not a wise course, or fit to be resorted to as a source of revenue for the security of the kingdom.

It is easy to see that an argument so constructed upon the right and expediency of a public measure admitted ample scope for the display of rhetoric ; and it would be unjust to say that the speaker did not employ all the powers of his ingenuity in setting forth the real or imaginary dangers arising from contributions to the crown, without the legislative approbation. He supposed many possible cases in which such subscriptions might be applied for the worst of purposes, the advantage of corporate bodies to the injury of the public weal, and even to the abolition of parliaments. By reasoning thus hypothetically, Mr. Sheridan was enabled to make out a number of formidable objections ; but, unfortunately for his cause, the whole of what he advanced proceeded on the ground that the people might sometime or other be so infatuated as to volunteer their personal services and property for the destruction of their own liberties. That no impost should be levied on the subject but by the legislature, is a sacred principle in the constitution ; but it would be extraordinary indeed, if in times of great public danger, particularly in the alarm of invasion, as was the case in the present instance, the people



could not be permitted, any other way than by their representatives, to make personal or pecuniary sacrifices for the national safety.

The essential difference between compulsory and voluntary contributions, and between public and private objects, was forgotten, or designedly overlooked by those who affected more than an ordinary sensibility for the rights of parliament and jealousy of regal encroachments. It was also singular that the persons who saw nothing but corruption and tyranny in the spontaneous generosity of the people, and their ardour to enrol for the defence of the country, could view with perfect indifference the combinations and subscriptions, which, under the specious pretext of obtaining parliamentary reform, would have entirely destroyed the constitution. Mr. Windham, in his animadversions on the motion and its author, dwelt with great severity on the inconsistency of the opposition, in thus deserting the genuine principles of their party, to join a set of men, whose notions of democracy would, if reduced to practice, end in universal anarchy. How sorely Mr. Sheridan felt this cutting speech, appeared in the virulence of his retort, and his challenging Windham to come forth boldly and impeach those whom he suspected of treason, instead of having recourse to skulking and insidious jeers.

This extraordinary and unparliamentary language produced a strong sensation in the house, which

happened to be very full, and a simultaneous cry of order burst forth from various quarters ; which, however, made little impression on the irritated orator, who proceeded to load his quondam associate with additional obloquy for leaving the ranks of opposition to join the minister, after representing him as an object of distrust and jealousy, and holding him up to the contempt and derision of the country. The issue of this long and stormy debate was a division on the previous question moved by the attorney-general, and which was carried by a great majority.

Perhaps the bitterness of political enmity was never carried to a greater height than during this session of parliament, between those who had hitherto acted in concert, but who were now radically divided upon public principles. Even on the slightest occasions, sarcasms were thrown out on the one side or the other, which provoked caustic replies ; and what on ordinary concerns would only have excited mirth, now operated with instantaneous violence in raising a tempest of conflicting passions. A curious instance of this occurred on the introduction of the bill for the encouragement of volunteers ; when Mr. Francis took occasion to animadvert upon the practice which had become prevalent of confining every discussion to three or four members, who occupied the attention of the house with speeches of many hours.

This observation was not taken in good part by any of the persons who felt the application; and after Mr. Fox had expressed himself with some warmth on the attempt made to justify the volunteer system by what had taken place when he was in power, Mr. Burke prefaced what he had to say on the same subject with declaring that he should not be unmindful of the hint just thrown out, and which had been drawn from a writer of great authority with the gentlemen opposite.

Solid men of Boston, make no long potations,

Solid men of Boston, make no long orations.

Bow! wow! wow!

And this injunction Mr. Burke said he could the more readily comply with, as he had in fact very little to say on the subject. At the period alluded to, Mr. Fox must know that though he held an office supposed to be very high and advantageous, that of paymaster-general, yet he was as completely ignorant of what was done in the cabinet as any man in England. As an allusion had been made in this business to the Marquis of Rockingham, who was the known patron of Burke, the opportunity was seized by Mr. Sheridan of replying with severity upon that gentleman, whom he indirectly accused not only of apostacy but ingratitude. He felt himself much disappointed, he said, at the kind of defence which he had a right to have expected from Mr. Burke

of the conduct of the Marquis of Rockingham, and supposed that the injunction against "long orations" was not the only moral precept in the system of ethics which served to regulate the practice of the right honourable gentleman. He would take the liberty to remind him of another passage in the same approved writer, in which he says:

He went to *Daddy Jenky*, by *Trimmer* Hal attended,  
In such company, good lack! how his morals must be mended.  
Bow! wow! wow!

He then proceeded in a strain of virulent animosity to contrast the conduct of Burke with that of Fox, praising the one for the generosity of his disposition in rising to vindicate the memory of the Marquis of Rockingham, while the other, who lay under greater obligations, had treated it with indifference. Nothing certainly could be more unjust or illiberal than this insinuation, because, as the character of the marquis had not been called in question, the vindication of it was wholly suprerogatory.

It is irksome to notice these contentions and personalities, but they are upon record, exhibiting a mortifying picture of talents perverted to the purposes of party, and wasted in the war of words, instead of being usefully employed for the general benefit of mankind.

Ever eager to goad the feelings of Burke, and to



hold him forth to the public as one who had basely deserted his principles, Mr. Sheridan followed him with keen asperity in the debate on a motion brought forward by Mr. Harrison for taxing placemen during the war. In suggesting this measure, the opposition could have no other object than that of gaining a little popularity; for it was admitted by Mr. Fox himself, that men in public office were far from being overpaid even in time of peace, consequently, as their labours must be greater in that of war, nothing could be more unreasonable than the reduction of their salaries. Yet this eminent statesman, after making such an acknowledgment, supported the motion, though, by a very unaccountable inconsistency, he at the same time endeavoured to free sinecure places from the proposed taxation, merely because it would have affected himself and some of his friends. Mr. Burke reprobated the measure altogether, as a paltry attempt to impede government, under the pretext of economy; for which he was severely handled by Sheridan, who reminded him of his own bill for reform in the public expenditure. In the course of this speech he adverted to Mr. Rose, and read a list of the appointments held by that gentleman, who retorted by observing, after all that had been said upon the question, what was the whole drift of the argument? It was an appeal to popular prejudices. Tax placemen and pensioners, is a re-echoing of the popular cry; but

he professed he did not perceive why they should be more taxed than the honourable gentleman, as the manager of his theatre, or than another man who travelled the country with his puppet-shew at his back. The concluding remark was not more severe and personal than the provocation which gave rise to it; yet Mr. Sheridan, forgetting that the attack was originally begun by himself, and that unquestionably in a very wanton manner, chose to complain of the language of Mr. Rose as an unparliamentary allusion to his circumstances and occupation.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

*Employment of French Emigrants.—Attempt to abrogate the Test Act.—Prussian Subsidy.—Mr. Sheridan's Reply on the Trial of Mr. Hastings.—Message of the King on the Danger of the Country.—Complaint of Mr. Sheridan against Libellers.—Ironical Observation of Mr. Burke.—Seditious Practices and Political Societies.—Motion for Peace.—Anecdote of Alderman le Mesurier.—Violent Dispute between Pitt and Sheridan.—Intemperance of the latter censured by the Speaker.—Vote of Thanks to Lord Hood.—State of the Country.—Compliment to Mr. Fox.*

THE history of Mr. Sheridan is so connected with that of the times in which he lived, as to render some account of public affairs essentially necessary, to the illustration of his character and conduct. If, however, in this position the orator does not appear to great advantage as a man of enlarged mind and liberal principles, weighing political subjects with deliberation, and treating them with temper, the fault lies in his unfortunate election, and not in the circumstances by which he was surrounded. When the remembrance of those eventful days shall be found only in the historical records of them, impartial posterity will turn indignantly from the picture of revolutionary France, to contemplate with astonishment the re-

sistance uniformly made in the English parliament against all the operations of government, which tended to provide a barrier against the ambition of the new republic, and the contamination of its principles. Among other measures resorted to for this purpose, that of the employment of the emigrants, who had been thrown by the fury of the revolution upon our shores, appeared to be so very just, that no serious objection to the adoption of it could reasonably have been anticipated. The opposition members, however, were of another mind; and when the bill was brought in to enable His Majesty to employ the subjects of France on foreign service, Mr. Sheridan assailed it with great violence as unnecessary and unconstitutional. It is evident, that the first ground resting on the question of expediency, could only be determined by the actual circumstances of the case, the objects of the war, and the relative situation of the two countries; on all of which there might exist different opinions; but the latter was a most extraordinary objection, when almost every period of our history furnished evidences and precedents to warrant the proceeding. At the time of our own revolution, the French refugees were employed in the military service of Great Britain both at home and abroad, and that too with considerable advantage; of which the battle of the Boyne exhibited a memorable example. The same was the case in the campaigns of Flanders, under



the Duke of Marlborough ; and yet both Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Fox reprobated the employment of French loyalists as an infringement of the constitution : the former, indeed, affected to consider the measure as an act of inhumanity towards the emigrants themselves, who would thereby be driven into battle with halters round their necks, since, in the event of their falling into the hands of the republicans, their fate must be inevitable. In this case, Mr. Sheridan demanded whether the law of retaliation would be put in force against the French prisoners of war ; and on receiving an answer in the affirmative, he exclaimed violently that this monstrous doctrine would introduce a system of human sacrifice all over Europe, forgetting in the heat of declamation that the crime and the consequences would rest on the revolutionary government of France, and could not be chargeable to those who were compelled by it to measures of severe retribution. Mr. Fox went farther, and maintained that the French would be perfectly justified in putting to death as rebels all the royalists that should be found in foreign service ; but if so, Louis the Fourteenth would have been equally warranted in executing the refugees who fought under Marlborough and Eugene ; and in like manner the adherents of James the Second might have been lawfully shot, when taken with arms in their hands, under a French or Spanish commission.

The debates on this bill gave rise to a proposition

from Mr. Sheridan for the employment of all native Catholics and dissenters in the army, without subjecting them to any religious test. But as such a measure would have virtually abrogated the corporation and test acts, of which, indeed, the mover himself was fully aware, the motion was rejected without a division.

We next find Mr. Sheridan exerting his powers with considerable energy in opposing the subsidiary treaty entered into with Prussia; for that state having evinced a disposition to recede from the contest, it was deemed advisable on the part of the rest of the allies to secure her co-operation by a pecuniary supply, which England and Holland stipulated to provide. It is evident that the policy of such a proceeding must be estimated by the circumstances of the period when it took place, and not by subsequent events which no man could foresee at the time. The prudence of subsidizing foreign powers has been often agitated, both in and out of parliament; but if ever the measure was justified on the plea of necessity, it was when the French revolution threatened the existence of all the sovereignties on the continent. There was a possibility that some of the states which entered into this confederacy might be insincere in their professions, and insensible of the general danger; but considering the stake at issue, it was hardly probable that either of them would be backward in endeavouring to repress a torrent,

which, if suffered to gather strength, would overwhelm the whole. Administration, therefore, was warranted in retaining Prussia, though at a great expense, rather than run the risk, by breaking up of the confederacy, of letting loose hordes of unprincipled barbarians, to prey upon the defenceless states of Europe. Mr. Sheridan, however, resisted the treaty, because Prussia was a principal in the war, and, therefore, had no right to look for any support from those allies who were not military. This position would have been plausible, had the objects of the war involved the interest of that state in a primary degree; or had England and Holland furnished a preponderating force like Austria for the furtherance of the general cause. As the case stood, it was but reasonable that those powers should furnish money, who were to be exempted in a great measure from sending forces into the field. The conduct of the King of Prussia is out of the question, which only takes in the policy of the engagement as far as related to the subsidizing parties, who could not, for the sake of economy, abandon the concern in which they were embarked, without endangering the common safety, and forfeiting their mutual pledge.

The long, tedious, and expensive trial of Mr. Hastings now drew to a close; and on the fourteenth of May, Mr. Sheridan made his reply to the evidence and arguments offered by the counsel for the defence on the Begum charge. Nothing,



however, occurred in this answer to throw additional light on the matter of charge; but the honourable manager made up in humour what he wanted in argument, and convulsed the court by his ludicrous representations of the subject.

Alluding to the restitution which must take place in the event of conviction, he insinuated that the apprehension of so serious a concern would operate in favour of the person accused; but while he deprecated the idea that so mercenary a principle could have any influence over the decision of the House of Lords, he apostrophized Mammon that it might not, in some beautiful lines, from the Fairy Queen of Spenser. In the course of this speech, Mr. Sheridan treated the leading counsel, Mr. Law, now Lord Ellenborough, in language of coarse severity, for having accused him of judicial legerdemain. The resentment excited by this reflection, but more by the invincible force of the legal arguments produced in the defence, appeared at the conclusion of the address, when Mr. Sheridan paid an exclusive compliment to the merits of Mr. Dallas and Mr. Plumer; though, as he said, vigour might be crippled into weakness by the cause it had to carry; and that there could little fame be gained in the arena, by throwing an antagonist who was forced to come on crutches.

The attention of parliament was now called by the royal message to the consideration of seditious



practices, which existed in London to an alarming degree, through the medium of systematized societies, holding an extensive correspondence with others in all parts of the kingdom. These political associations were all formed on the French model, and their avowed object was the establishment of a general convention on the same plan, and composed of similar elements with that of Paris. The royal communication was accompanied with a voluminous mass of documents, consisting principally of books and papers found in the possession of the several persons who were then confined on a charge of treason. A secret committee of the House of Commons was appointed to examine this body of evidence; and on the sixteenth of May the first report was brought up by Mr. Pitt, who clearly developed the proceedings of the London Corresponding Society, which was the main spring of all the affiliated bodies throughout the empire; and he concluded with moving for leave to bring in a bill to empower His Majesty to secure and detain all such persons as should be suspected of conspiring against his person and government.

This motion was strenuously opposed by Mr. Fox, who defended the societies from the charge brought against them of a design to subvert the constitution; and he maintained that the members of them were lovers of peace, who pursued a constitutional object by legal measures. Mr. Sheridan

not only re-echoed the same sentiments, but, by a most extraordinary stretch of confidence in the very teeth of evidence, he pronounced the whole a fabrication of ministers to create a panic, and secure their ascendancy over the people. In the same spirit he repeatedly called Mr. Pitt the British Barrere ; and observed, that though far from being of a sanguinary disposition, he should not be sorry to see the minister lose his head upon the scaffold. At the close of this intemperate speech, he complained bitterly of the abuse which was daily poured upon himself in the newspapers, though in general he despised such calumnies, and never should think them worthy of prosecution. Even on that very day he had been accused, he said, of holding an improper communication with Mr. Stone, who was outlawed ; upon which he observed, that among the many prosecutions carried on to support the dignity of parliament, the attorney-general should feel himself interested in vindicating the characters of its individual members. This suggestion called up Mr. Burke, who said, that without meaning, in the smallest degree, to dispute the magnanimity of Mr. Sheridan in despising newspaper attacks, and never subjecting them to prosecution, he could not easily believe that his provocations were without parallel. A man so prominent on the theatre of politics, and who possessed, as he unquestionably did, uncommon genius and activity, must naturally expect to

be drawn before the scrutinizing tribunal of the daily papers; and he was very much deceived, if Mr. Sheridan, generally speaking, was not mercifully dealt with by those censors; at least, he never knew a gentleman so much in the eye of the public who had fared better from the journalists. He thought it therefore rather strange, that when he declined himself the invidious task of prosecuting the papers in which he was traduced, he should be so ready to confer that employment on the attorney-general. If his advice, however, could have any weight, he would recommend to the learned gentleman not to accept of the commission, lest he should draw upon himself that animadversion from which he attempted to free his neighbour.

Mr. Sheridan replied to this ironical remark, by observing that he did not wish the attorney-general to interpose between him and any newspaper calumniators. His allusion, he said, was to a specific charge contained in a treasury journal, though ministers were aware of its foulness and falsehood.

Sir John Scott, the attorney-general, was still more severe than Burke, by observing, that whilst gentlemen called upon him to support their private characters, he begged leave to remind them that they were clogging his proceedings in the formation of societies for the express purpose of supporting libellers under prosecution.



In a renewal of the debate the following day, the same acrimonious charges were brought against ministers, of having invented the conspiracy on which the report was framed, and which the orator characterized as a political artifice, the composition of a committee, consisting of men deceiving or in part deceived. Some observations having been made on the attentions bestowed by the opposition to Muir and Palmer at Woolwich, Mr. Sheridan candidly and spiritedly admitted that he had been one of those visitants; adding, that he should rather have been ashamed under all the circumstances, if he had not paid a visit to men who were, in his judgment, persecuted and oppressed. With regard to the societies, whose proceedings constituted the basis of the report, he said that ministers were long since in possession of every circumstance connected with them; and well knew that they had drill serjeants in the back rooms, where they mustered at the Cat and Magpie, and Black Dragon. Now, the natural inference to have been drawn from this passive conduct of the executive, was that of its being a prudent resolution to wait for the more complete development of the designs of these meetings, before legal measures should be taken against them. Mr. Sheridan, on the contrary, thought proper to give another interpretation to the silence of ministers, and to assign as the only reason why they did not proceed on the informations which they had re-



ceived, was, that they knew the whole to be false. After so bold a declaration, it was no great wonder that the same tongue should proceed to describe the political societies as perfectly harmless, and even laudable in their designs, constructed upon approved principles, and acting with the ingenuousness of conscious integrity.

One thing observable in this speech was the countenance given to the preposterous doctrine of universal suffrage, which had been censured strongly by Mr. Dundas, on the ground of its impracticability; but this, Mr. Sheridan said, was a mere matter of opinion. What the precise or sober judgment of the latter might have been on this point, it would, perhaps, be difficult to conjecture; but if the authority of Mr. Capel Lofft be of any validity, he at one time carried his notions on annual elections and parliamentary reform to as extravagant a length as any of the political theorists of the present day. His language in the House of Commons certainly afforded room for suspicion that he did not disapprove of those associations, which were most obnoxious to the government, and alarming to the community. It was, therefore, with a very ill grace that he presumed to complain of calumny, who was so forward in loading others with odium, and holding them up to public contempt as knaves or fools. Of this acuteness of feeling for himself, and want of it for those who differed from him, Mr. Sheridan

gave a striking proof in the debate on the motion for peace, brought forward by Mr. Fox. In his speech on that occasion, he maintained that the war arose out of the selfish ambition of ministers, who, to further their object, had invented fabulous plots, and forged conspiracies, of which no existence could be found but in their foul imaginations. After such a base charge, which involved the moral character of the first men in the kingdom, it was perfectly natural that the calumniator should express his sympathy for the culprits who were then in confinement on a charge of treason, and of whose seditious practices there can be but one opinion: but it was ludicrous to hear a serious complaint made against one of the city magistrates, for having said, in the way of joke, that, if the habeas corpus act were suspended, Sheridan, in less than two months, would be in the Tower. When called upon to mention the person who had made use of the expression, he replied, "No: there is another reason, for, as a poet somewhere says,

"It is a name uncouth to British ears."

But while he affected this indifference, he took care to let the house know who the party was, by saying, that if the laws of England assimilated with those of Scotland, he might, with the assistance of the attorney-general, send the chief magistrate of London to Botany Bay.

Mr. Le Mesurier, the lord mayor, and member of parliament for Southwark, was the person alluded to; and in answer, he informed the house that the whole of the complaint lay in a mistake; but that as he had received notice of a prosecution from the attorney of the honourable member, he should say no more on the subject. This intelligence did not add to the credit of Sheridan, in resorting first to legal measures for reparation, and then, before trial, making a formal appeal in the house for no other purpose than that of creating prejudice against the party with whom he was at issue.

A much more serious contention, however, arose in the course of the same evening, on the scandalous accusation that had been brought against ministers of hatching fictitious conspiracies. It was impossible that Mr. Pitt could, with the feelings of a man, pass over this abominable aspersion on the whole body of his colleagues, and the committee of secrecy, without some animadversion. “**But,**” he observed, “that accustomed as he and his friends in office were to the abuse of Mr. Sheridan, he should not have thought it worth while to notice even this attack, were it not rendered peculiar by being brought against the report of twenty-one members, whose character for honour and integrity he would not injure, by comparing it with the quarter from which the attack was made.”



Here the minister was called to order by Mr. Courtenay, for having been guilty of personal rudeness: and the Speaker, on being referred to, acknowledged his error in not having before repressed the irregularity of Sheridan, admitting, at the same time, that both members were disorderly. Mr. Pitt, while he bowed with deference to the authority of the chair, could not forget the insult which he had received, and therefore, in signifying his readiness to make an apology, he said, it should only be where it was due, to the Speaker and the house, as the language which he had been called to answer was neither within the rules of parliamentary order nor parliamentary decency. This exception, though perfectly justified by the aggression, only served to exasperate the irritated temper of Sheridan, who replied, that he should treat with perfect contempt every apology made in that house; and that he was well assured the right honourable gentleman would give him no provocation out of it. He then, in a tone of defiance, repeated the offensive declaration about fabricated plots, observing, however, that he spoke of the government not as men but as ministers. Notwithstanding this distinction, which, if allowed, would convert the first deliberative assembly of the nation into a bear-garden, the expression again called down censure from the chair, and after a little more altercation, the business terminated in a division on the previous question, which was carried by a great majority.



Another instance of political acerbity appeared shortly after this, on a motion of thanks to Lord Hood, for the reduction of Bastia, in the Island of Corsica. On such occasions, the spirit of party should subside, and give way to a generous commendation of laborious exertions and valorous achievements, even though objections may be raised against the policy or justice of the war in which those services have been performed. Commanders must scrupulously fulfil the instructions which they receive from their employers, and exercise the discretionary powers with which they are entrusted to the best of their judgment. After discharging their duty faithfully, and accomplishing the object on which they were sent, nothing could be more unjust or impolitic than the refusal of the public approbation, as thereby professional merit would be undervalued, and the spirit of emulation depressed. Unmindful of this obvious principle, Mr. Sheridan strenuously resisted the motion of thanks to Lord Hood; and by contrasting the services of the veteran admiral with those of Lord Howe and Sir John Jervis, he endeavoured to prove that the former had done nothing to deserve the honourable reward which was now proposed. At the conclusion of his speech on this subject, he made an unfortunate allusion to the Westminster election, which at once indicated the cause of all the spleen that he had expressed; or, to use the language of Mr. Serjeant Watson, "let the cat out

of the bag." The orator felt that he had gone too far; but being unwilling to confess his motive, by retracting his error, he moved, as an amendment, a vote of thanks to several officers, some of whom were not on the service with Lord Hood; and when reminded of this circumstance, he coolly observed that he was only concerned there were not more mistakes in the business, as being more congenial to the proposition. There was such a littleness of mind in all this, as contributed very materially to lessen the opposition still lower in the general opinion, when it was seen how eagerly they acted upon old prejudices, in matters which affected alike the public interest and private feeling. The pertinacity of the party in finding subjects for contention, where both sides should have been honourably united, only served to strengthen the hands of government, by an accession of force in the administration, and increased popularity in the country. Several persons of high distinction and leading influence, who had been accustomed to vote with Mr. Fox, now accepted public offices of the first importance; and, among the rest, Mr. Windham was appointed secretary at war, with a seat in the cabinet.

This conduct was branded as apostacy by Mr. Sheridan, in his speech at the end of the session, on a motion for enquiring into the fulfilment of the Prussian treaty. The object of this motion, however, was rather that of delivering an invective

upon the state of the country, the incapacity of ministers, and the inconsistency of their new associates, than to investigate the particulars of a subsidy which had already been the subject of parliamentary discussion. On this occasion the orator, in his customary manner, rambled with abrupt vehemence from one topic to another, running interrogatively through the history of the war, and inferring in the same convenient form that the persons at the head of affairs had neither abilities nor honesty. Having asserted roundly that the people had experienced nothing but deception from the conduct of ministers, Mr. Sheridan demanded whether any hope had been cherished that had not been disappointed ;—or any one promise made that had not been completely broken? This declamation, which had not much of novelty in it, served the purpose of throwing ridicule upon the orator's old acquaintance, who had just formed an alliance with a government, that, according to the representation here given of it, was unworthy of public confidence, or individual support. After some pleasant observations on Mr. Windham, who was now reposing in the cool shade of the Chiltern Hundreds, Mr. Sheridan proceeded in a strain of indignant feeling to exclaim against the inconsistency of the minister and his new associates, contrasting their present union with the avowed principles of the Whig party, as expressed in the year 1784, that it was repugnant to the dignity of parliament to countenance



the manner in which the existing administration got into power, until some atonement should have been made for the violation of the principles of the constitution. Something of an extraordinary nature, Mr. Sheridan observed, must have happened, before such persons could have sacrificed their consistency and their honour;—either that the administration was weak, and inadequate to the task they had undertaken, an idea which, whatever the public might think of them in other respects, they would never allow—or that the country was in such a situation as to call for a union of party, without any regard to consistency of character—or that the responsibility of proceeding on the present system ought to be divided between ministers and those who had constantly opposed all their measures.

According to this curious logic, the persons who were the objects of attack having formerly protested against the basis on which the administration was formed, were under an obligation to continue in opposition under every change of circumstance, even when all differences had subsided, and the condition of the country required a complete sacrifice of private resentment and party spirit for the public good. Between the ministers and Whig seceders there was no difference of principle at all; but this was far from being the case with regard to the latter, and their old political friends, who, in espousing the revolutionary doctrines, and defending the societies that had been formed on the French



model, were the real authors of that schism which they so vehemently reprobated. When such a radical change took place, the want of consistency would have been in the continuance of a union among men whose sentiments on a subject of vital moment were totally at variance. To have merited the confidence of Mr. Fox, and the eulogies of Mr. Sheridan, these distinguished persons must have either compromised their principles, or, by remaining neuter, have rendered themselves contemptible in the judgment of all honest and independent men. It would be ridiculous to say that the fears of the separatists were chimerical; for while they believed the contrary, and facts existed to warrant the apprehension of danger from the progress of republican doctrines, and the violence of those who propagated them, so long were the alarmists bound to abandon all private friendships, and to sacrifice public resentment for the security of that constitution which appeared to them surrounded by crafty and infuriated enemies.

The phalanx, which still remained under the banner of Mr. Fox, might be, and no doubt were, as sincere on their part in believing that there was no cause of dread from the dissemination of French principles, or the encroachments of French policy; but they had no moral right to call in question the integrity and consistency of men, who, seeing things in a very different light, judged it an imperative duty to strengthen the hands of government,

though, by so doing, it was necessary to relinquish old and esteemed connexions. That would be a very strange, and I might even say, an execrable consistency, which, under such circumstances, should keep public men together merely for the sake of personal attachment, while they held opposite opinions on the state of the country, and the measures necessary for its security.

Mr. Fox could not avoid feeling sensibly the defection of so many of his most valuable friends ; and though he might be somewhat relieved by the affectionate zeal of those who still adhered to his standard, the sense of what he had lost was not likely to be rendered less acute by the consideration of what he retained. Even the high-flown praise bestowed upon him in his absence, by the most eloquent of his adherents, was little calculated to cheer his mind, however gratifying it might be for the moment to his vanity, when he learnt that the panegyric was mixed with such caustic invectives as tended to widen a breach which had already gone beyond the original thoughts or views of either party. Yet, as if a reconciliation had been neither practicable nor desirable, Mr. Sheridan represented the seceding Whigs as men who had sacrificed their honour, and prostituted their talents to the support of an insane system, while his right honourable friend stood an insulated example of public virtue and wisdom. If, said the orator, this infatuated administration had gained nothing

by their new alliance, but an additional infusion of rashness and obstinacy, he was confident the hour was not far off when the duped and deluded people would lose at once their credulity and their patience ; when a solemn hour of account would come ; an hour, which the having seduced others to share the peril of, would neither ward off nor protract ; when the eyes, the hopes, the hearts of the nation would be turned to one man, to his right honourable friend, whom he spoke of more willingly in his absence ; a man in whose mind, however its generous nature might be wounded by a separation from long-formed and dearly cherished connexions, he was confident there would ever be found a paramount attachment to the safety, the prosperity, and independence of his country, as well as to the liberty and happiness of mankind in general ; a man, who, at this very moment, he believed, did not, to the public eye, appear less for being more alone ; on the contrary, who seemed to stand on higher ground from being less surrounded. To him in the stormy hour the nation would turn, and they would find him

“ Like a great sea-mark, standing every flow,  
And saving those that eye him.”

Mr. Pitt replied at great length to this variegated speech, and animadverted with severity on many parts of it, particularly the attack which had been made upon the new members of administration,



whose secession from the opposition had called forth a torrent of virulent abuse, which only did credit to the objects upon whom it was poured. The minister observed, that this coalition was the effect of principle, acting in the conduct of men who felt as they tendered their allegiance, as they tendered their safety, and as they cherished the memory of their ancestors ; that they were bound to lay aside every distinction, to remove every obstacle, and to unite the talents, the characters, the integrity, and the honour of all honest men who were able to save their country : upon which union depended, most essentially, the present security not only of Great Britain, but of all Europe. Mr. Sheridan having said that the English government was extremely odious in North America, where, by his own account, the French had numerous friends, Mr. Pitt seized the opportunity of saying, that he could not have believed, had he not heard it from his own lips, that the persons who professed jacobin principles in America were part of the honourable gentleman's correspondents ; it was, however, of very little consequence, whether the British ministers were popular or unpopular in America : he, for one, always expected to be unpopular with jacobins, at home and abroad. It was enough for him to know that the popularity of administration in this country would depend on the success of their efforts to check the progress of jacobin principles, and on their firmness in oppo-



sing them, wherever they occurred, and in whatever shape they might be found. Mr. Sheridan replied with equal spirit : but though he affected an air of triumph in having obtained from Mr. Pitt an acknowledgment that the destruction of the French government was the real object of the war ; and though he declared that the one which he had himself in view, by the present motion, was the restoration of peace with that country, which, he said, had then as regular a government as any other in Europe ; he shrunk from a division, and on the same day the session, which was one of the most fertile and important in the political history of this extraordinary man, terminated by a speech from the throne.

## CHAPTER XXV.

*Opening of Drury Lane Theatre.—Embarrassments of that Concern.—Acquittal of the Persons charged with High Treason.—Meeting of Parliament.—Singular Interruption of the Ordinary Business on this Occasion.—Attack on Mr. Dundas, and Reflections on the Duke of Portland.—Motion on the Habeas Corpus Act.—Strange Conduct of Mr. Sheridan on the Parliamentary Discussion of the Affairs of the Prince of Wales.*

THE new theatre in Drury Lane, after much delay, and many disputes, particularly with the performers, who had been obliged to apply to the Court of Chancery for the payment of their salaries. was at length completed on a most elegant and capacious plan by Mr. Holland. On the tenth of March, 1794, the house was opened with a grand selection of sacred music from the works of Handel; and on the twenty-first of the following month, the exhibition of dramatic performances commenced with the play of *Macbeth*, and the farce of the *Virgin Unmasked*; but to the disappointment of the public, and an overflowing audience, the muse of Sheridan was silent on an occasion so essential to his interests.

Owing to a variety of causes, into which it would be needless to enter, the expenses incurred in the

progress of the work went far beyond the original estimate; and thus the new concern became encumbered with an enormous debt at the very beginning, on which account no benefits were allowed during the first season. It may here be worth noting, that at the desire of Mr. Sheridan, a plank of the old stage, on which Garrick had trod, was preserved from the wreck, and carefully placed in the floor of the new building. This mark of respect to the memory of that excellent actor reflected credit on the grateful feelings of him who suggested it; and well would it have been, both for himself and for that concern, which Garrick had rendered so lucrative, if he had devoted to its advancement a portion of that time and talent which he wasted on unprofitable pursuits, and in the whirlwind of politics.

While on this subject, it may be as well to mention, that, in the year 1795, His Majesty granted a renewal of the license to Drury Lane for twenty-one years, it having been the idea at the purchase of Killegrew's patent, that, upon the proprietors of the King's Theatre making a proper compensation, they might have the use of this house for the performance of Italian operas. The same year an attempt was made to dispose of a considerable share in the concern, for which purpose a partnership agreement took place between Mr. Sheridan on the one side, and Mr. Joseph Richardson and Mr. John Grubb on the

other; but some demur arising about the state of the theatre, and the conditions to be observed, this contract was relinquished. Shortly afterwards, forty-seven rent charges, at three thousand pounds each, were created on the theatre, the purchaser of every share being entitled to receive one pound on each night of performance, besides other advantages.

These endeavours to relieve the establishment from its difficulties only increased them, by loading the income with an enormous expense, and preventing the possibility of creating an accumulating fund for the benefit of the proprietors. Public complaints on the state of this favourite place of amusement had been both loud and frequent from the time when Garrick relinquished the stage; but though the concern was injured, debts were multiplied, and the performers murmured, nothing was done either to correct the disorders which prevailed, or to infuse vigour into the management, and economy in the treasury. When that admirable performer, Mr. Thomas King, gave in his resignation as the stage manager of Drury Lane, he found it necessary to publish an apologetical statement of his reasons for that measure, in which narrative he judiciously avoided making any reflections upon his late employers; but the picture which he gave of the disordered condition of the theatre, and of the total want of all regularity in the direction of its concerns, was



in fact a much stronger censure than could have been conveyed in a charge against individuals. Matters were not improved after the demolition of the old building ; and, however gratified the town might be by the erection of a splendid edifice, the entertainments afforded did not answer the public expectation.

The attention of the nation was greatly occupied at the close of this year by the trials of various persons, members of the political societies, who stood charged with the crime of high treason. That government was warranted in bringing these men before a tribunal of justice cannot be doubted for a moment by any one who reads the evidence that appeared against them with care, and weighs it with impartiality. Indeed, the grand jury, who found true bills against the accused, and the petty jury, who deliberated three hours before they pronounced a verdict of acquittal in favour of the first prisoner, sufficiently justified vigilant measures, and the recourse to legal investigation. But though enough appeared to satisfy every unprejudiced mind that seditious combinations and practices had existed in a degree to call for judicial enquiry, the proof of actual treason was certainly incomplete. If, instead of laying the indictment so high in a case which demanded direct evidence of overt acts, these persons had stood charged with being guilty of a treasonable misdemeanour, no doubt can be entertained of their conviction.

Ministers committed a great error in this course of proceeding; and the result not only gave an advantage to their opponents, but inspired the factious with daring confidence, which was increased by the successes of the French, and the symptoms of defection manifested on the part of some of our allies. Such was the posture of public affairs at the meeting of parliament on the thirtieth of December; when a circumstance occurred unprecedented in the annals of political warfare, and rendered the more remarkable, because it was totally unnecessary for any purpose of the party, and could have no other object than that of shewing open disrespect to the sovereign. On the first day of the session, the regular custom is to read and pass the bill for the prosecution of clandestine outlawries, as an assertion of the right of the Commons to enter upon the discussion of any business they chuse, without a direct communication from the throne. On the present occasion, when the Speaker was putting the question in the ordinary way, to the astonishment of all who were not in the secret, Mr. Sheridan rose to oppose the bill; and this he did for the purpose of delivering a long speech before that from the throne should be taken into consideration. After inveighing with great vehemence against the conduct of ministers, and exulting in the recent acquittal of the persons accused of treason, as affording a proof, according to his account, that

no plots or conspiracies existed, he gave notice of his intention to move the repeal of the bill passed in the last session for the suspension of the habeas corpus act. Mr. Sheridan was replied to by Mr. Pitt, and some other members, who drew an obvious line of distinction between an acquittal upon a charge of treason, and the evidence of treasonable practices, which had satisfied the minds of the grand jury in sending the prisoners to trial. It certainly was an odd sort of triumph which drew every thing from the verdict of a jury, and nothing from the innocence of the prisoners; which gave all the glory to the law, and left the crime of sedition to the men who were acquitted of treason. Nothing that Mr. Sheridan could say in the house, nor the most ingenious advocates allege out of it, amounted to any thing like a refutation of the charge, that confederacies had been formed in this country, the object of which was the subversion of the constitution. The late trials established this fact beyond all question, and yet the acquittal of the accused parties on one ground only was considered, very strangely, as decisive of the perfect innocence of their intentions, and of the peaceableness of their conduct; when on all sides it appeared incontrovertible that individually and collectively they had acted in direct imitation of the proceedings in France, and with the most determined malignity to the constituted authorities of their own country. The failure, however, of

government in proving the guilt of the parties to the extent of what they were indicted furnished ample scope for the exertions of opposition; but the time and manner adopted for obtruding the subject upon the house indicated such a studied design to give offence, as shewed that the love of justice was of less consideration than the desire of victory. That the interruption of the ordinary course on this day arose from no other principle was put beyond doubt by the circumstance, that when Mr. Sheridan had succeeded in producing a desultory debate without any motion, he suffered the usual bill to proceed, and contented himself with promising to bring the matter again before the house during the session. This desultory conversation being ended, the members had a right to expect that no further obstruction would have been thrown in the way of the regular business, which, by every rule of courtesy and established usage, ought to have taken the precedence of all other considerations. But, as if it was intended to render the king's speech ridiculous, and the servants of the crown contemptible in the eyes of the public, Mr. Sheridan, after disturbing the customary order of parliament in one instance, ventured upon another interruption of the regular business of the day, by an attack upon Mr. Dundas, whom he affected to treat as an illustrious stranger in the body of the house, having vacated his seat by accepting the office of third secretary



of state, which had been abolished by act of parliament. It was proved, however, by Mr. Pitt, and admitted by Mr. Fox, that as the situation which constituted the object of this charge was held by the Duke of Portland there could be no ground for the present allegation against Mr. Dundas, and which, if substantiated, would have subjected that gentleman to the penalty of five hundred pounds, besides the loss of his seat. The explanation, instead of eliciting a handsome apology, or imposing silence, only drew forth some strong sarcasms upon the herculean powers of Dundas, and the political defection of the noble duke, who had not long before been the object of the orator's unqualified praise, and on the continuance of whose friendship he had placed the fullest confidence.

It is impossible to find any excuse for these violations of established usages, when no circumstance existed to render the infraction of such forms at all necessary, and when not even the plea of any benefit was set up for the interruption.

On the fifth of January, Mr. Sheridan made his promised motion for a repeal of the bill passed in the last session, suspending the habeas corpus act. In urging this measure, he contended that the internal state of the country was such as to give the fullest assurance of security to the government in the loyal spirit of the people; but the principal ground for the motion was taken from the late

trials, the issue of which, it was maintained, fully proved that no conspiracies existed to warrant the abridgment of the rights and liberties of Englishmen. On the general question, Mr. Sheridan was elaborate and impressive; but the argument drawn from the decision of juries on a specific charge was too fallacious for credence, when in support of it the orator himself was obliged to acknowledge that numerous societies had been created, and were yet in being, of a very questionable character. In running through the evidence, for the purpose of establishing his position, that the suspension of the great bulwark of freedom was an arbitrary proceeding, uncalled for by any circumstances of existing danger or apprehended mischief, Mr. Sheridan was under the necessity of relating much that had come out on the trials, with regard to the construction and views of several political institutions throughout the kingdom, from all of which it was evident, to any man who had not a particular purpose to serve, that innovations of the most serious description and extent were not only meditated, but in actual preparation. The speech with which this motion was introduced abounded with humour; and the ludicrous representation given of the conspiracies, which had occasioned so much trouble to ministers, and alarm in the nation, could hardly fail to excite risibility in the most inflexible muscles. There was a camp in a back shop, an arsenal provided with nine muskets,

and an exchequer containing nine pounds and one bad shilling; all to be directed against the armed force and established government of Great Britain. Mr. Sheridan, having exhibited this whimsical caricature of some part of the evidence, observed, that he from the beginning had shewn the most obstinate incredulity with respect to all the rumours of a plot: and then he repeated his former assertion, that the whole originated in the malevolent invention of ministers, for the base purpose of misleading the people, and rendering the opposition odious. This was a very heavy accusation, and such a one as, if borne out by a single instance of proof, ought to have been followed by an impeachment of the persons who could be so unprincipled as to fabricate plots, and propagate false alarms, merely to secure the possession of power, and to mislead the public mind. But it was impossible that the orator himself could believe what he asserted, for it was too heinous and aggravated an offence to exist, without something more to reprobate its flagitiousness than a mere parliamentary declamation. He must have been conscious at the time of his bringing forward so enormous a charge that it could not be true, since, if any evidence of its reality could be found, it was his duty to have visited the guilty party with a judicial enquiry. Mr. Sheridan was aware that his foundation for this reproachful language against public men was purely hypothetical, for he admitted in

this very speech that instances of sedition might perchance be found in the country, though the evidence even of these, he said, appeared in so questionable a shape as to excite suspicion. He dwelt then with great acrimony on the employment of spies and informers, which he pronounced to be a system of policy calculated to engender suspicion, and to beget hostility, destroying all confidence between man and man, and between the governors and the governed; creating sedition where it does not find any; and resembling in its operations the conduct of the father of all informers, the Devil, who introduced himself into Paradise, not only to inform his own pandemonium of the state of that region, but to deceive and betray the inhabitants. There was considerable force in all this; and that government must no doubt be radically bad which relies on such means for its support. There is, however, a wide difference between an occasional employment of spies to detect the secret workers of mischief, whose designs are known, but who have the art to conceal their operations, and an inquisitorial intrusion into the privacies of families, or the social intercourse of amicable societies. The acrimony with which Mr. Sheridan treated his former connexions, who now formed part of the administration, might have been excused, had he contented himself with general observations on the inconsistency of their conduct, and the weakness



of their fears ; but when he called their integrity in question, and accused them with having secretly bargained for a share of the wages of corruption, he laid himself open to a severe correction in the way of retaliation. Mr. Windham, after describing the speech of Sheridan as a wretched coarse rhapsody, founded on vulgar topics of declamation, fitted only to make an impression upon the rabble, proceeded to defend himself and his associates from the virulent abuse which had been cast upon their motives. "Such calumnies," said Windham, "are only to be resisted by the shield of character ;—to that my noble friends and I resort. I am truly sorry the honourable gentleman is not ashamed of such low mean traffic.—I defy him to shew a single circumstance that can tend to cast a shadow of doubt on our conduct. The malice of the design is so corrected by the impotency of the effort, that I will not sacrifice a word in answering it."

The shield of character was indeed most powerful in this instance, because it presented a striking contrast to the quarter from whence the attack proceeded ; and as such the observation must have been keenly felt, if not by Mr. Sheridan, yet, at least, by the persons with whom he acted.

On the twenty-fourth of March, Mr. Fox moved in a long and eloquent speech for a committee of the whole house to consider the state of the nation. His avowed design was the removal of

ministers; and he plainly declared, that if the House of Commons did not unite with him in this object, by supporting the resolution which he now brought forward, it would, in reality, be lost to all the functions for which it was constituted. Having taken a wide survey of the state of European politics, and descanted strongly upon the calamities of the war, which at that period had certainly a gloomy aspect, he diverged to the state of Ireland, and the condition of the Roman Catholics, who were, as he said, deprived of their natural rights, and their country plunged in misery, by the corruption and oppression of the English government. This allusion to Ireland was artfully managed; but after making every allowance for the stratagems of parliamentary warfare, it would be exceedingly difficult to justify the conduct of Mr. Fox in this instance on the principle of general policy or liberality. He very well knew that the agitation of this subject was only calculated to produce a ferment where it was desirable to allay the discontent which already existed; and he knew also, that instead of any peculiar or additional grievances being felt by the Irish Romanists, they had experienced in the course of the present reign many acts of indulgence and substantial benefits. The exclusions of which they complained were not new, but coeval with the revolution, while some were even of older date; it was, therefore, very uncandid in Mr. Fox

to charge the hardship of these restraints to the account of ministers, who had neither created them, nor added to the number.

Mr. Fox was answered by the minister, who avoided going into any particular view of the war, confining himself chiefly to that part of the argument which related to the internal state of the country, the alleged deficiency of the revenue, and the reduction of the population, both which assertions, as advanced by the opposition, he denied. The positions of Mr. Fox, however, were defended by Mr. Sheridan, whose attack on administration was not less vigorous and skilfully directed than that of his friend. He took a comprehensive survey of the war, and inferred from the disastrous events which had occurred in the course of it that the imagination of man could not conceive another country where ministers would be suffered to retain their situations, after a series of calamities unparalleled in the annals of Europe, and a continuance of misconduct unexampled in history.

Referring to Irish affairs, he asserted that this was the second attempt made by ministers to enslave the Irish people, under the fallacious plea of conferring on them peculiar advantages.

Whatever may be said of such language, as coming within the latitude of parliamentary license, it certainly was far from being adapted to allay popular discontent in the one country, or to generate a spirit of conciliation in the other.

But the most remarkable business of this session, and that on which Mr. Sheridan rendered himself particularly conspicuous, was in relation to the affairs of the Prince of Wales, in consequence of his marriage. From the zeal manifested by him in the concerns of his royal highness, on former occasions, and the acknowledged confidence that had been reposed in his counsels, it was natural to expect that he would take part in the discussion of the present subject; but it was also to be supposed that he would do this with great caution in the disclosure of facts, and temper in his manner of reasoning upon them. Such a line of conduct was called for by the peculiarity of the circumstances, and the footing on which Mr. Sheridan was generally known to have stood at Carleton House. Instead, however, of governing himself by so obvious a rule, he astonished the public, and distressed many of his political friends, by the eagerness with which he entered upon the private concerns of the prince, and the odious light in which his representations placed that illustrious personage and his family.

When the involved circumstances of his royal highness came under the consideration of parliament in the year 1787, an assurance was given by His Majesty that no future application would be made for the payment of any debts which the prince might contract, as he had given his promise to confine his expenses within the bounds of his income. Notwithstanding this pledge, it now



appeared that a debt of not less six hundred thousand pounds had been incurred since that period; which discovery threw ministers into a state of great embarrassment, as an adequate provision was to be made for the establishment of the prince, and it was needful that he should be released from his present difficulties. In such an exigency, nothing more could be done than to grant a proper income, and to allot part of it for the purpose of gradually discharging the existing incumbrances. This plan met with the concurrence of his royal highness, whose approbation of it was signified to the house by Mr. Anstruther, his solicitor-general; in consequence of which, Mr. Pitt directly made a motion that the committee appointed to bring in a bill on the subject should be instructed to frame it accordingly. But though Mr. Fox expressed his opinion in favour of the measure, and considered it as by no means making parliament responsible for the debts of the prince, Mr. Sheridan, even in this early stage of the business, declared open hostility to the proceeding, and contended that the house ought not to be deluded, humbugged, and deceived in that way. He maintained that the settling of one hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds a-year upon the prince, with such a condition as that proposed, was virtually binding parliament to the discharge of those debts which ought to be paid off immediately, for the dignity of his royal highness, who

ought not, he said, to be seen rolling about the streets in his state coach as an insolvent prodigal. But while the necessity of a complete and instant release of the prince from his embarrassments was thus vehemently urged, Mr. Sheridan no less strenuously contended that the public ought not to be burthened with the pressure of a hair to afford that relief. He observed, that by coming to that house at all for the payment of his debts, the prince had been ill-advised ; and he sincerely believed that the king had not an honest minister about him, or else such an application as this would never have been made to parliament. After repeating that the debts ought to be paid, the orator proceeded in the same passionate strain to remark, that if it was meant to keep monarchy respectable in the eyes of this country, and of the world, a different conduct ought to have been pursued. The sum of two or three hundred thousand pounds he reckoned trifling, when compared to the unbecoming situation of an heir apparent to the crown, without independence, and, what was worse, without character.

Having in this free and certainly very indecorous manner animadverted upon irregularities, which at a former period he would not have suffered any other person to censure without exercising the lash of his wit, Mr. Sheridan made some broad allusions to their majesties, whose conduct he insinuated had been very reprehensible.

A few days afterwards, when the subject was renewed on a motion made by Mr. Pitt, that in the event of the demise of the Prince of Wales, the liquidation of such debts as remained unpaid should be charged on the consolidated fund, Mr. Sheridan went at greater length into the case, persisting that the proposed income was too large, and that the debts should be paid partly by the king, and partly by the sale of the Duchy of Cornwall. However plausible and popular such a scheme might be, it was liable to insuperable objections, on the ground of public and private justice; for it would be very hard to call upon the king, who has no estates of his own, to pay off the incumbrances of the heir apparent, who is of full age, and over whose income he has no control. Nor was there much more reason in the suggestion for the sale of the Duchy lands; for as the prince had only a temporary interest in them, nothing could be more palpably repugnant to the principles of equity than to injure a line of succession for his particular benefit, and to free him from difficulties into which he ought not to have fallen. Another and still more strange idea that offered itself to the imagination of Mr. Sheridan on this occasion was that of deducting a certain sum for this purpose from those places and sinecures, which, as he remarked, neither added dignity to the crown, nor were calculated to afford it support. This extraordinary scheme seems to have operated

very strongly in the mind of the person who conceived it, for he dwelt upon it as an instance of great condescension, that he would not take away any gentleman's sinecure place, but only appoint a committee as trustees, in whom might be vested the revenues of useless offices, which, after the death of the holders, should, as they fell, be applied to extinguish the principal of the prince's debts.

Such was the measure which Mr. Sheridan observed would command the gratitude of posterity, and render the constitution stable. The gratitude of posterity, however, was much more likely to be secured by a retrenchment in the expenditure of the prince, and by reflecting that he had, through his own economy, cleared off his heavy encumbrances, than by seeing him released from his difficulties at the expense of particular families, whose incomes were narrowed to pay off his debts. The notice taken of the Duchy of Cornwall brought up the question of the right of the prince to its entire revenues during the years of his minority. It was averred, and truly, that the establishment of this claim would render the prince solvent; but then, on the other hand, to do this the public must have made good what had been applied to general services. This, however, in the judgment of Mr. Sheridan, made no other difference than the fact, that the public would only have the satisfaction of repaying the prince his



own. Mr. Pitt and the attorney-general resisted this doctrine altogether; and the latter clearly proved, by the adduction of authorities, that, from the earliest periods of our history, the revenue of the Duchy of Cornwall had been always in the disposal of the crown during the minority of the prince.

Throughout these debates there was a palpable want of respect to the king; and, on one occasion, Mr. Sheridan observed, that though His Majesty possessed many great and good qualities, yet, on the subject of expense, or of keeping promises, the prince would not suffer in a comparison. On being called to order for this invidious remark, he sheltered himself under the privileged distinction, that in speaking nominally of the king, he must be understood as meaning his ministers; a distinction, by the way, which in this case could not be fairly allowed, because the offensive observation was made in the form of a moral contrast, between the two highest personages in the kingdom, and had nothing of that political character which constitutes the only apology for the free use of the sovereign's name in parliamentary debate. But that the comparison was in reality designed to affect the personal feelings of the king, appeared evident beyond all doubt, from the remarkable narrative which Mr. Sheridan related immediately afterwards, of what took place at the period when the promise was made on behalf of the prince,

that he would not contract any more debts that should render an application to parliament necessary. After stating the particulars attending the original establishment of the prince, and the embarrassments which arose out of the scantiness of his income, Mr. Sheridan said, that though he held no official situation about his royal highness, he was honoured with his confidence, and was often asked for his advice, chiefly from the knowledge of his fixed determination to accept of no obligation whatever. This remark he seems to have made for the purpose of evincing his perfect independence, and to refute the calumnies which had been long and generally circulated against him on account of his intimacy at Carleton House ; but he now declared, in the face of parliament and of the country, that he never had received from the Prince of Wales so much as the present of a horse, or of a picture. Having thus vindicated the integrity of his own conduct and principles, he proceeded to exhibit a charge of the most serious nature, which directly involved the first characters in the kingdom, by representing the prince as either being a party in a system of evasive duplicity, or the dupe of the most scandalous imposition. The pledge given eight years before was now roundly asserted to have been done without his consent or privity. The disclosure of this fact, admitting it to have been strictly correct, was highly imprudent, because it affected the reputation of every

person concerned. Mr. Sheridan allowed that the prince was bound by the engagement, as he had accepted the grant which was founded upon it; but, he said, that at the time when the business was agitated, he advised his royal highness not to give any such promise, because it was not to be expected that he could himself enforce a system of economy, and was totally unprovided with servants adequate to such a task. Thus it appeared that the pledge was not conceived or brought forward without being submitted in its primary state to the consideration of the prince, and discussed between him and his confidential adviser. That it was objected to upon substantial grounds may be true, but the flagitious imputation of its having been a device, smuggled, as it were, into the agreement, absolutely without making the illustrious person whom it most nearly concerned at all acquainted with it, was completely refuted. Mr. Sheridan then proceeded to state, that after dissuading his royal highness from contracting any obligation of the nature of that now proposed to him, he drew up a plan of retrenchment himself, which met with the approbation both of the prince and the king to such a degree, that the former assured him the promise was relinquished. To his great astonishment, however, when the royal message was read to the house, he found that it contained this very objectionable pledge; and on being asked by the prince afterwards to contradict

it in his place, he refused, because the message had been previously read to his royal highness, though the latter assured him he did not understand it as conveying any promise. Such was the secret piece of history divulged by Mr. Sheridan after so long a lapse of time, and without any apparent reason for the disclosure, since nothing had transpired in the course of the deliberations on the affairs of the prince that rendered the information at all necessary. The obvious tendency of the relation unquestionably was that of placing the king in an unfavourable point of view, as the principal in an act of deception practised both upon his son and the parliament, for the mean purpose of obtaining a large pecuniary grant to gratify the cravings and wild waste of thoughtless extravagance.

Aware that this strong language might be construed into personal disrespect to the royal family, Mr. Sheridan endeavoured to guard himself from the imputation such an interpretation would have produced, by throwing the whole odium upon ministers, for not having interposed to check expenses, of which, he said, they could not pretend ignorance, but over which he could not prove that they had any control. This negligence, however, on the part of administration, was represented as the primary cause of the embarrassed situation of the prince, who had recourse to means for relieving himself from his difficulties, which only tended



ultimately to increase them. An attempt had been made to raise a loan for him in foreign countries; but as that was a measure which Mr. Sheridan thought unconstitutional, a stop was put to it, and the bonds were burnt, to the great loss of the prince. After this, another plan of retrenchment was proposed, upon which frequent consultations were held with Lord Thurlow, who told the prince, that after the promise he had made he must not think of applying to parliament; that he must avoid being of any party in politics; but, above all, of exposing himself to the suspicion of being influenced in political opinion by his embarrassments; that the only course he could pursue with honour was to retire from public life for a time, and appropriate the greater part of his income to the liquidation of his debts. Such was the plan agreed upon in the autumn of 1792; and how it came not to be acted upon, Mr. Sheridan explained, by saying that about this period his royal highness began to receive unsolicited advice from another quarter. He was told by Lord Loughborough that the plan savoured too much of French principles, and that he could easily guess from whom it proceeded. For his own part, Sheridan observed, he was of opinion, that to have avoided meddling in the great political questions then under discussion, and to have put his affairs in a train of adjustment, would have better become his high station, and tended more to

secure public respect than the pageantry of state liveries.

By adhering to this plan of moderation and voluntary retrenchment, it was contended that the prince would have been, in point of popularity, as well as in rank, the second man in the kingdom, whereas, by the one then proposed, he would neither have the credit of economy, nor the power of correcting future errors. His past misconduct was exhibited in the harshest point of view: he was set in a gilded pillory, and sent to do public penance in an embroidered sheet.

Throughout the whole of the discussion of this subject, Mr. Sheridan distinguished himself in the same vehement manner, and sometimes by expressions which could not but astonish all who had witnessed the ardency of his zeal in defending the prince on former occasions. Among other things, he described the intended act as a pitiful screen to shield the heir apparent from the operation of his bond, for soliciting of which he had no hesitation in pronouncing such a man unfit to reign over an enlightened nation.

This outrageous language called up Colonel Fullarton, who reproached Sheridan in severe terms for betraying those secrets which had been entrusted to him in confidence, and concluded with the indignant declaration that there was not a beggar in the streets who would not rather live under a hedge than owe a shilling to the liberality

of the house, if thrown at him with such bitter taunts as those which had been vented against the Prince of Wales.

Mr. Sheridan in explanation denied his having been the secret counsellor of his royal highness, to whom he never gave any advice in which he did not wish it were possible for the king to stand on one side, and the people of England on the other. He repeated the story which he had before told respecting the manly conduct of Lord Thurlow, and the manner in which his opinion had been counteracted by Lord Loughborough. In this reply he descended to personal invectives against the colonel, who, as he said, had ransacked the English language to find trite sayings, and so obscured his speech with metaphor, and embellished it with coarse daubing, as to render it totally unintelligible to meaner capacities. In answer to dark insinuations, Mr. Sheridan observed that he had never accepted the slightest favour from the prince, during the long period that he had enjoyed his confidence.

But it is evident that this vindication of himself from the charge of ingratitude was no excuse for the intemperance of his expressions, and the violation of secrecy. That he was not the official counsellor of the prince, or employed under him in any capacity, made little or no difference in the present case; for as his own character had not been implicated, and the public service was far

from requiring the detail of private conversations, the story, and the manner of telling it, had an invidious aspect, and neither indicated delicacy of sentiment towards the royal family, nor regard to the feelings of the other personages whose names were so freely mentioned. The motive for this extraordinary conduct appeared incidentally in the confession of Mr. Sheridan, that he had not of late been a visitor at Carleton House; the cause of which, though he did not expressly assign, he insinuated by saying that his opinion always had been that the Prince of Wales ought never to adopt a decided part in politics. This declaration was, if possible, still more unaccountable than any part of the business, because it was in the recollection of the whole assembly that Mr. Sheridan had on many occasions brought his royal highness prominently forward as being closely connected with his party. It was also known that at one time, and by the same advice, the prince went down to the House of Lords to vote with the minority, for no other purpose than to serve the private views of his political friends; and Mr. Sheridan, among other counsels which he gave for the benefit of the prince, recommended the laying out of a large sum in the purchase of a commanding influence over the leading newspapers, for one of the principal of which the bargain was actually made. After all this, it was too much to reflect on his royal highness for taking any part in poli-



tics: but the truth was, that Mr. Sheridan's anger had been kindled at the cool reception which he experienced for the freedom of his remarks on the conduct of the prince in delivering his sentiments as a peer of parliament on the state of the country.

That neutrality, which was now a rule in the political code of Mr. Sheridan, would, at such a period, and under the alarming circumstances of the nation, have been extremely injudicious, as either indicating apathy amidst surrounding dangers, or more regard to old connexions than the public weal. Had the prince remained in a state of quietude when the constitution was assailed from within and without; and when the principles of all government were treated as the dreams of superstition, he might possibly have obtained the commendation of those who affected to see nothing more in the encroachments of faction than the progress of liberty; but he would have procured this at the expense of that confidence which it was his duty to cultivate as the destined ruler of an extensive empire. With the feuds of parties it certainly would have been unwise to meddle; but the question then at issue was not the preference of one set of men, or the policy of any particular measures: it affected the vital system of social order, the existence of the monarchy, and the security of property. Here, then, it became an imperative duty on the prince to come forward with an open declaration of his sentiments on a subject

of so much interest; and this was still the more incumbent upon him, on account of his having been so long connected with the very party who now presumed to teach him the lesson of political moderation, but which certainly came with a very ill grace from those who had formerly initiated him into their mysteries, and boasted of his patronage; who availed themselves of his partiality for them at a most critical period, and made no scruple of anticipating a change of ministers from that circumstance alone, the moment he should be in possession of the sovereign power. Considering these things, nothing could be more ungracious, to say the least of it, than the harsh return made to his royal highness, at a moment when his private happiness and public credit required the kindest solicitude and the most generous exertions. If afterwards he forgot the reproaches which had been thus cast upon him in the hour of his need, not by an open enemy, but a confidential friend, and if he bestowed upon the person who made such an unworthy use of his friendship a situation of two thousand a-year, as treasurer of the Duchy of Cornwall, posterity, on reading the parliamentary records, and considering the liberal manner in which the injury was obliterated, will have reason to admire the magnanimity of the prince, and to be disgusted with the morbid patriotism of his calumniator.

Should any fastidious reader censure this lan-

guage as too severe, let him consider whether the moral character of a sovereign is of less consideration than that of a private person; and whether, in order to throw a veil over the aberrations of an individual man of talent, it is proper to leave a stigma upon the reputation of his prince. The particulars here narrated are upon the journals of parliament, and are consequently interwoven in the history of the country; to have passed them over, therefore, in this place, would have been a palpable infringement of literary justice; and to have touched them slightly, out of respect to the dead, would have been prejudicial to truth, by leaving it a doubtful question whether the breach of private faith is reconcileable to the principle of public duty.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

*Second Marriage of Mr. Sheridan.—Meeting of Parliament.—Attack upon the King.—State of Public Affairs.—Bills for the Suppression of Treason and Sedition.—Mr. Sheridan's Threat of Secession.—His Vindication of Political Societies.—Hostility to Mr. Pitt and Bishop Horsley.—Compliment to Dr. Parr.—Anecdote concerning the School for Scandal.—Proceedings against Mr. Reeves, on Account of his Tract upon Government.—Royal Message relative to the State of France.—Humourous Opposition to the Dog Tax.—Dissolution of Parliament.—Pretended Discovery of the Manuscripts of Shakspeare.—Anecdotes of the Play of Vortigern.*

ON the twenty-seventh of April, 1795, Mr. Sheridan married Miss Hester Ogle, daughter of the Dean of Winchester, and nearly related to many of the most respectable families in the kingdom. The lady had only five thousand pounds from her father, who insisted that Sheridan should add fifteen thousand more to her portion, which sum he was obliged to raise by the sale of shares in his theatre. Sometime afterwards, at the desire of the dean, the estate of Polesden, in Surrey, near Leatherhead, was purchased, and settled upon Mrs. Sheridan and her issue. But one son only, named Charles, is the offspring of this union ; as another,



named Thomas, is the only survivor of the first marriage.

Our attention must now again be turned to parliamentary affairs; for such was the gloomy state of things in consequence of the popular discontents produced by the high price of provisions, and the prodigious activity of the agents of sedition, that ministers thought it necessary to commence the session as early as the twenty-ninth of October, which day was marked by the most daring attacks upon the person of the king, in his passage to the house, and also in his return through the park. That there was a treasonable design against the life of the sovereign, was evident from the continuance of the outrages through the whole course of the procession; the horrible language which was vociferated by the mob; the attempt made to murder the king in Palace Yard; and, lastly, the ferocious renewal of the assault when he was going in his private carriage from St. James's to Buckingham House. On account of these flagitious acts, the lords adjourned till the following day; but the king's speech was taken into consideration in the lower house as usual.

Mr. Sheridan displayed great eloquence on this occasion: and as His Majesty had commenced his speech with declaring his satisfaction, that, from the altered state of public opinion in France, there was a probability of the restoration of peace, he fastened with singular address upon that expression,

which he placed in a vast variety of lights, in order to represent more strongly the miseries of the country, and the disasters of the war. There was, no doubt, ample range for his powers, and objects enough upon which he could exert them with ease and effect ; but in playing upon the word satisfaction, and giving it a ludicrous turn at such a moment, he betrayed little judgment, and less feeling. He was really surprised, he said, how ministers could have the front to put such words into the mouth of His Majesty ; and that they could suffer the king, when he passed through his starving and oppressed, and sorry he was to hear, irritated and clamorous people, to come down to the house and express his satisfaction. But by far the most extraordinary part in this speech of Mr. Sheridan was, the charge which he brought against the British government of making the restoration of Louis XVIII. the absolute condition of peace, for which position there was neither proof nor probability.

The assertion, however, if it did not afford solid ground of argument, opened a wide field for declamation against ministers, of whom, it was said, that if it were true, as it was suspected, that they wished to advise His Majesty to exhaust the treasures and spill the blood of the country, to restore the ancient tyranny of the French monarchy, they deserved to lose their heads. Mr. Sheridan then poured out the most cruel invectives upon the whole house of Bourbon, who were, he said, the

uniform and inveterate enemies of Great Britain, its liberty, and its commerce; thus confining the national envy and rivalry to this unfortunate race, than which nothing could be more preposterous and unjust.

It could hardly be supposed that the daring outrages which had been perpetrated, when the sovereign was in the discharge of the highest duty belonging to his function, should pass without some strong measures, particularly when it was known that numerous associations existed for the avowed object of promoting a revolution, and immense assemblages took place in the vicinity of the metropolis, where orators of the worst description endeavoured to poison the minds of the ignorant, and to inflame the discontented. In consequence of these alarming appearances, a proclamation was issued, enjoining magistrates and loyal subjects to exert themselves in preventing and suppressing all unlawful meetings, and the dissemination of seditious publications. Such was the indignation excited by the infamous assault upon the king, that on leaving the house it was immediately cleared of all strangers, and a consultation held by the Lords in what manner to proceed upon such an emergency. An address to His Majesty was resolved upon, and a conference with the Commons requested for their concurrence. Both houses having agreed in the proposed measure, on the sixth of November, Lord Grenville brought in a bill for the

better security of the king's person and government against treasonable practices; and three days afterwards a similar proposition was made in the House of Commons by Mr. Pitt, who proved satisfactorily, to every unprejudiced understanding, that new legislative powers were wanting to invigorate the arm of the magistrate, and prevent those evils which were ripening fast to the injury of the public peace, and the imminent ruin of the constitution.

After what had so recently occurred, and from the glaring evidence which appeared in all directions of a tendency to anarchy and revolution, something at least like moderation ought to have distinguished the proceedings of the opposition. So far, however, was this from being the case, that it would not be easy to point out in the history of parliament more inflammatory harangues than were uttered while these bills were in progress. In the upper house, the late Marquis of Lansdown ventured to express his persuasion that the attack upon the king was a ministerial plot, and an alarm-bell to frighten the people into subjection; in other words, that it was a scheme planned and executed by ministers themselves, for the purpose of continuing their power. Wild and extravagant as this idea was, more characteristic of an inhabitant of Bedlam than an enlightened statesman, it was caught and amplified by some of the leading men of the same party in the other house. When the bill was moved for, Mr. Sheridan replied in a very strong and



sarcastic manner to Mr. Wilberforce, whom he reproached bitterly for his inconsistency in supporting a measure, which, as he said, violated the fundamental principles of the Bill of Rights. After proceeding in this manner for some time, he undertook the defence of the meetings in the fields near Copenhagen House, which he described as peaceable, sober, and conformable to the principles of the constitution. Having thus vindicated those tumultuary assemblies, where sedition was preached by a set of demagogues, whose talents and morals were just fitted to operate upon the worst passions of the rabble, Mr. Sheridan more than insinuated that the system of terror was the contrivance of government, and therefore, instead of the connexion which had been attempted to be made out between the proceedings at Copenhagen House, and the outrage on His Majesty, that outrage, he said, might probably be traced to some one of the army of spies, who, having been thrown out of employ in consequence of plots being discredited, and the suspension of the habeas corpus act being repealed, might be desirous of reviving the trade of alarm, and might think too that this measure would be grateful to ministers, by affording them a plausible pretext to destroy the liberties of the country. From the general distrust which he had of every fresh attempt to create alarm, he was led to conclude, he said, that if ministers should follow up the enquiry with respect to the authors of the

outrage, it would end in the execution of one of their own spies.

The utmost stretch of human credulity or christian charity can never induce the belief that this was really the opinion of any man of common understanding, either in or out of parliament; because, to warrant such a supposition, he must make up his mind to the conviction that the whole body of ministers had no more regard for the life of the sovereign than for their own safety and reputation. If these outrageous proceedings were the contrivance of the persons in power, they must have been the weakest as well as the wickedest of men, by having recourse to those means for their support, which were the most likely to prove their destruction, and to cover them with infamy. But reasoning upon such a visionary theme would be almost as absurd as the presumption on which it rested; and the only apology to be offered for those who advanced it is the undefined privilege of parliamentary debate, which, after all, will neither satisfy the moralist on the point of liberality, nor the politician on that of general utility. If the opposition really believed that the outrages which had been committed originated with ministers for the basest of all purposes, something more was necessary on their part than declamation; and if they went only upon surmise and imagination, whatever may be said of their ingenuity, it will be impossible to give them credit for candour or generosity. But “it is

pleasant to see the engineer hoist with his own petar ;” and of this the conduct of the party exhibited a curious illustration, for the shape in which they framed their accusation against the government, for contriving fictitious plots, and fabricating artificial conspiracies, plainly proved that the representation was a political device to colour their resistance to the bill then in progress for the security of the sovereign, and the preservation of public peace.

Mr. Sheridan and his friends seem to have thought, that by giving this turn to the shocking scenes which had so recently occurred, they should at once find a strong plea for opposing the vigorous measures which were now adopting, and render ministers odious in the general estimation. The populace are sooner led by their passions than by their reason ; and this mode of attacking ministers was well calculated to inflame the disaffected, and to create prejudice among those who were too violent, either to pause for reflection, or to take the trouble of examining the evidence of facts and the balance of probabilities. But however effectual such a course might be in its operation on spirits of that description, it is inconceivable how men of enlarged minds could suppose that they had the least chance of making any impression by it upon a deliberative assembly. Mr. Sheridan, indeed, affected a conviction that he should produce that effect, by expressing his resolution to

oppose the bill in every stage of the committee as well as out of it, and in the detail as well as in the principle. "For my part," said he, "if this bill shall pass, I shall think myself unworthy to continue any longer the prattling representative of a dumb and enslaved people; and I shall consider this house as unworthy of the exception which secures to its members that freedom of discussion which they will then have so justly forfeited."

In combating the bill, through every step of its progress, he was as good as his word; and it must be confessed, that he displayed equal energy and eloquence, acuteness in framing his objections, and power of language in the application of them. The late trials and acquittal of the parties charged with treason afforded, as might naturally be expected, much in support of the assumption that confederacies to overturn the government did not exist; but even granting the most that could be made of this, it remained with the opposition to shew, that the political meetings and societies then multiplying were perfectly innoxious, and might be safely permitted to accumulate strength, without any reasonable cause of apprehension. Mr. Sheridan thought they might, and that their loyalty to the person of the king was unquestionable: while all the world knew, that in these assemblies monarchy itself was reprobated as an usurpation of the natural rights of mankind, and that the lawfulness of regicide was maintained in



the lectures of the orators, and in the tracts which they circulated.

Throughout the debates which arose on the measures proposed to repress these incipient tendencies to a revolution, Mr. Sheridan defended the London Corresponding Society, and the branches which had ramified out of it in various directions, contending, from his own knowledge, that the charges against those associations were wholly unfounded, that the real objects which they had in view were a change of ministers, the restoration of peace, and parliamentary reform. In one of the most intemperate of his speeches on this occasion, Mr. Sheridan said that riots, tumults, and insurrections, had been frequent in almost every country throughout England, and that His Majesty's troops had often been called upon to shed the blood of his subjects. "Now to what," he exclaimed, "was the temper of irritation in so many parts of the country to be ascribed?—Not to any exertions of the London Corresponding Society; for these symptoms had appeared in quarters where it had no influence: they were, therefore, to be ascribed to the general state of pressure arising from the war, to the apprehensions of approaching scarcity, and in some instances to the actual ravages of famine." But the conclusion was marked by a doctrine the most singular, perhaps, ever broached in the heat of political controversy; for Mr. Sheridan maintained that the whole representative

body there assembled were the servants of the people of England, and that they voted and acted in that house not in their individual capacity, but as the agents and attornies of others. This certainly is a theory on the constitution of parliament which has the merit of novelty; but there was a period when the deliberate exhibition of it, even in the warmth of a debate, would not have been suffered to pass without a strong vote of censure as being a direct attack on the independent privileges of the commons no less than upon those of the crown. Parliament is called by the king's writ, and returned by the qualified electors; but the members are no more the attornies of the one than they are of the other, unless attornies have the power of making laws to bind their clients. It seemed necessary to notice this paradoxical position, and some other observations which occasionally fell from the same quarter, because the zeal of Mr. Sheridan for the constitutional liberties of the country has been so often mentioned in extenuation of his violence against other men, and particularly of his conduct during these proceedings, in arraigning government with the foul design of destroying the liberties of the people. They who brought a charge of this heinous nature ought to have governed their own temper and language with great discretion; but both Mr. Fox, and his eloquent adherent, made strange havoc with the principles of that very constitution which they

described as being in jeopardy through the infractions of ministers. The leader of the opposition made no scruple of avowing it as his fixed sentiment, that in the event of passing the bill, it would give him little anxiety if it should be found impracticable to suppress the spirit of resistance. This doctrine he maintained repeatedly, making, without any qualification, the question of obedience on the part of the people a matter of expedience, and not of duty or morality.

Mr. Sheridan, in defending the language of his friend against Mr. Windham, who had denounced it as a call to rebellion, avowed the sentiment more explicitly, and declared that if a degraded and oppressed majority of the people applied to him, he would advise them to acquiesce in those bills only as long as resistance was imprudent. How the opinion of the majority of the people was to be collected, he did not condescend to explain, but he said enough to arm the discontented with a plausible pretext for opposing any statutes that might be obnoxious to them, and, by consequence, for resisting the operation of the laws in any case, whenever it might be deemed necessary to make the stand. All the sophistry in the world cannot get rid of the inference; for if the people have a right to determine the boundaries of obedience, and to make prudence the rule by which they are to be guided in the construction of duty, then authority is at an end, and anarchy begins. When

Mr. Sheridan gave this boundless latitude to licentiousness, he did no more than pay a tribute of respect to Mr. Pitt in comparing him to Robespierre, and running the parallel to the extremity of virulent malignity by the force of his imagination.

In the course of this fiery conflict, many petitions were presented to the house against the legislative measures then pending for the security of the laws and constitution. How things of this nature are managed, and with what facility signatures are obtained on such occasions, no person who has paid the slightest attention to the political history of this reign need to be told. Among the petitions which were brought forward at this time, was one from Rochester; but though it was subscribed by fifteen hundred names, Sir Edward Knatchbull, the county member, thought it his duty to state that not more than one hundred and fifty of these were the signatures of freemen of that city. The honourable member at the same time reflected very severely upon the conduct of the mayor, in suffering, not long before, a scandalous procession to disgrace Rochester, for the purpose of throwing contempt upon the bishop, whose effigy was publicly burnt. This circumstance was alone sufficient to shew in what spirit the petition had originated, and with what views it was manufactured. Mr. Sheridan, therefore, would have acted prudently in suffering the information to pass without the exercise of his wit; but the opportu-



nity was too alluring for him to avoid the display of his talent at humour. Having made some observations on a petition from Birmingham, he proceeded to say a word or two upon the Rochester tale, which, if the case had permitted, he said, would have come with a better grace, so far as merely related to the name, from the neighbouring city of Canterbury, as it was of that species which is commonly called a Canterbury tale. He conceived, however, that the story was not at all entitled to credit, so far as it involved the persons who subscribed the petition. He deprecated the circumstance that related to a right reverend prelate, but suspected it had arisen from a statement in the public papers, which he hoped was a misrepresentation, as he could not for a moment imagine any learned and dignified person could be so indiscreet, and so ignorant of the principles of our constitution, as to say, "that the mass of the people had nothing to do with the laws but to obey them."

The prelate here alluded to was the late learned and venerable Bishop Horsley, upon whom much obloquy has been poured, for an assertion in the House of Lords, which, like most other abstract propositions, when wrested from the context, may be construed to any bad sense that craft can devise or prejudice may fancy. But the meaning of the bishop was obvious to every man of sense and liberality; and even without an explanation, the

position is a stubborn truth, and a self-evident principle in every moral and political creed, except that which gives to the people an indefinite right to set bounds to their own obedience, and to overturn the laws whenever the same shall be offensive to their feelings.

Mr. Sheridan, the same evening, was more felicitous and commendable in the eulogy paid to an old friend and school-fellow; for having presented two petitions from Warwick, he observed, that as some stress had been laid upon the respectability of signatures, he would state, that the first person whose name was to these petitions was that of Lord Dormer; and the third, that of a man, who, though no bishop, was by his unrivalled worth, and unrivalled learning, entitled to the respect and esteem of every person:—he meant Dr. Samuel Parr.

During the discussion of the bill for preventing seditious meetings, an observation fell from one of the law members, justifying, by the history of the stage, the clause which restrained political lectures to licensed places; on which Mr. Sheridan took the opportunity of explaining the origin of that restriction, and of relating an anecdote to shew how the power of the licenser was sometimes abused.

On the night before the first appearance of the School for Scandal, he was informed that it could not be performed, as a license was refused. It

happened at this time that there was a famous city contest for the office of Chamberlain, between John Wilkes and Bond Hopkins. The latter had been charged with some practices similar to those of Moses the Jew, in lending money to young men under age; and it was supposed that the character of the play was levelled at him, in order to injure him in the election, in which he was supported by the ministerial interest.

In the warmth of such a contest, the piece was represented as a factious and seditious opposition to a court candidate. He, however, went to the Earl of Hertford, then Lord Chamberlain, who laughed at the affair, and gave the license. For his own part, Mr. Sheridan said, he deemed a theatre no fit place for politics, nor could he think much of the principles or taste of the man who should wish to introduce them into stage representation. With respect to the London stage, the fact was, that the players were considered as the king's servants, and the theatre the king's theatre; therefore it was natural that no pieces should be permitted that were disagreeable to His Majesty. He concluded this speech with declaring that if the bill passed into a law, it would either be the final doom of liberty in this country, or that it must lead to those dreadful scenes of distraction and commotion, which every man must deprecate, and which he would almost rather die than be compelled to witness.

The bill, however, did pass, notwithstanding this strong denunciation, and alarming predictions, which happily were so far from being realized, that the internal tranquillity of the country was thereby secured; and though Mr. Sheridan intimated that he should be no longer inclined to act as the representative of deaf and dumb constituents, he continued for many years to sit in the House of Commons, affording amusement by his wit, and astonishing strangers by his elocution, even when he was most erratic in his sallies, and sophistical in his arguments.

While this business occupied the attention of parliament, another arose incidentally out of it, of a very extraordinary description, involving the opposition in the charge of tyranny and persecūtion, which they were so forward in bringing against administration. If there be any one subject more than another which Englishmen have a right to examine with perfect freedom, and to publish their opinions thereon, provided they do it dispassionately, and without any malevolent intention, it is the origin of government, and the principles of legislation. On this privilege there can hardly exist a difference of sentiment; and of all men, those calling themselves Whigs are the last who should venture to infringe the right, or attempt to punish any person for the exercise of it, even when he advances extravagant doctrines, and such as may lead to dangerous conclusions.



Yet in violation of the boasted principles of the party, and the practice which had been uniformly defended by them, in regard to political disquisition, a complaint was formally made by Mr. Sturt on the publication of a pamphlet entitled "Thoughts on the English Government," which, though anonymous, was known to be the production of Mr. John Reeves, the founder of the loyal associations, and as such peculiarly obnoxious to the opposition. In this performance the author treated the subject historically; and in that view he considered the monarchy as the root out of which the other branches of the constitution originally sprung.

Now, whatever may be thought of the metaphor, the fact is certain, that the peerage emanated from the crown; and it neither requires the labour of the antiquary, nor the skill of the lawyer, to prove that the sovereignty was entire in England, for all the functions of government before any thing like the election of representatives to parliament had existence; and that even when it had, those knights and burgesses were summoned by the writ of the king to such place and at such times as suited his pleasure. How the constitution has been gradually improved is another question; but he who shall pretend to treat the subject as an historical enquiry, must take it as he finds it, and beginning at the fountain head, proceed downwards to the period when it arrived at

its present state of comparative perfection. The author of the pamphlet so pursued the investigation; and yet his performance was stigmatized as being a rank libel upon that constitution, the history of which it professed to trace, and the progressive vigour of which it elaborately defended. When, however, the party thought that this publication would enable them to gain a triumph over government, by blowing up the loyal associations, they commenced a furious attack on Mr. Reeves and his pamphlet, as having no other object than that of undermining the constitution. Mr. Sturt, who began the operations, was considered as too violent and insignificant to have the direction of the business, which was then entrusted to the management of Mr. Sheridan; and on the twenty-sixth of November he made a motion that the pamphlet in question was a malicious, scandalous, and seditious libel, highly reflecting on the glorious revolution, containing matters tending to create jealousies and divisions among His Majesty's subjects, to alienate their affections from our present happy form of government, as established in kings, lords, and commons, and to subvert the true principles of our free constitution; and that the said pamphlet is a high breach of the privileges of this house.

It is unnecessary to make any abstract of the speeches which were delivered on this extraordinary occasion; and the admirers of the opposition

will have no reason to complain of an omission which throws into shade what nothing could justify. The crime of Mr. Reeves was not that of writing and printing a discourse upon government, but of having instituted those societies, which, in a season of imminent danger, had essentially contributed to save the constitution. On this account alone did Mr. Sheridan and his political friends endeavour to bring down upon him the vengeance of the house, by moving that one of the books should be burnt by the hangman in New Palace Yard, and another at the Royal Exchange; but this was not the worst, for the motion went in express terms to call the author to the bar of the house, and for an application to His Majesty to remove him from any place of trust that he might then hold. This extraordinary demand, which went to punish an author without enquiry, and to pronounce his book a libel without any trial, came from the very quarter which had on all occasions most strenuously advocated the liberty of the press, even when that liberty had exceeded the bounds of all decorum. Mr. Erskine, who had not long before defended the publication of Paine's Rights of Man with his wonted eloquence, and in the speech which he delivered on that trial contended ably for the privilege of investigating the origin of government, and the abuses of it, to the greatest extent, now supported a motion, which, if it had been carried,

would have made all political enquiry dangerous to those who should enter upon it, without being previously assured of the protection of party. The House of Commons, however, was happily saved from the disgrace of assuming the power of an inquisition, or star chamber; and the alleged libel, on the motion of Mr. Dundas, was remitted to the Court of King's Bench, on the prosecution of the crown, where the author was acquitted, in spite of the prediction of Mr. Erskine, who said that the jury impannelled to try the cause would feel themselves involved as parties no less than the House of Commons who ordered the prosecution; which intimation was calculated for no other purpose than that of creating prejudice against the man who was to be put upon his trial. If any thing could add to the extreme absurdity and injustice of this transaction, it was that of calling the vindictive and summary mode of punishment, originally proposed, an example of lenity and mercy, though this was nothing less than fixing a public brand upon an author, without giving him an opportunity of defending himself, and depriving him of his bread, by a vote of the House of Commons, for no other offence than that of writing parabolically upon so grave a subject as the origin of government. Mr. Sheridan might well justify the proceeding which he recommended by the anomalous case of Dr. Sacheverel, whose impeachment for two foolish sermons, which nobody would



otherwise have read, stands an everlasting monument of national folly, and the madness of party.

But this was not the only strange act of inconsistency which marked the history of opposition at the close of that year; for when a message from the throne was brought down to the house, signifying the readiness of His Majesty to meet any pacific disposition on the part of the enemy, Mr. Sheridan moved a long amendment to the proposed address, in which the grounds of the war were reprobated, and parliament was called upon to retract all its resolutions and proceedings in the support of it. That the House of Commons could be so far lost to the sense of what was due to its own dignity and consistency, as to commit such an act of suicidal insanity, was not to be supposed; and it must have been equal weakness in those who proposed it, if they really imagined that their force of numbers or reasoning was sufficient to induce the adoption of the amendment. It obtained, indeed, as a matter of course, the zealous support of Mr. Fox and Mr. Grey, whose arguments, however, were so successfully repelled, that no division took place, and the address was carried. How men, who had on so many occasions been loud and clamorous for peace, could all at once throw a damp upon an overture to that effect, when it came from the throne, may appear very unaccountable; but the truth is, the proposi-

tion was offensive to them on that very account, and because it did not originate with themselves. Their object was to make the negotiation for peace the triumph of party, otherwise they could not, with any regard to their repeated professions, have placed impediments in the way of government, when it came voluntarily forward to express an inclination so congenial to what they had themselves declared to be the prevailing desire of their hearts, and indispensably necessary for the salvation of the country. It is true that Mr. Sheridan presumed to call the sincerity of the minister in question ; but this, so far from making any alteration in the case, only marked the impolicy of opposition, who, by declining to raise any obstacles of their own which might furnish Mr. Pitt with an excuse for persevering in the war, would have effectually brought his integrity to the test; and in the event of detecting his duplicity, would, as a matter of course, have ensured his downfall.

During the remainder of this session, which continued till the middle of May, and then terminated with a dissolution of parliament, Mr. Sheridan chiefly distinguished himself by his diligence in moving an enquiry into the particulars of the expedition to the West Indies, under Sir Charles Grey, and the still more disastrous one in favour of the French royalists to Quiberon. On both subjects he displayed his talent for strong representation and high colouring with considerable

effect; particularly in depicting the sufferings of the unfortunate men who had perished on these occasions, and which, as might be expected, were attributed to the bad conduct and negligence of ministers. Another topic, on which his descriptive powers were employed very happily, though less pathetically, was the motion for a tax upon dogs, made by Mr. Dent, and which Mr. Sheridan criticised in a strain of humour that was irresistible. In regard to the bill itself, he said that he never met with one more extraordinarily worded; and the folly of it extended even to the title; for instead of being designated "A Tax Bill," it was called "A Bill for the better Protection of the Persons and Property of His Majesty's Subjects against the Evil arising from the Increase of Dogs, by subjecting the keeping or having such Dogs to a Duty." So that instead of supposing, as it had generally been, that dogs were better than watchmen for the protection of property, people might be led to imagine that dogs were guilty of all the burglaries usually committed. In the preamble also there was the same species of phraseology; for it begins—"Whereas many dangers, accidents, and inconveniences," (which to be sure was a beautiful climax) "had happened to the cattle and other property of His Majesty's subjects." Now he had never before heard of any particular accidents happening to property from the hydrophobia, except in the case of cattle. In the *Adventurer*, in-

deed, he remembered a sort of whimsical account of a dog that bit a hog in the streets, the hog bit a farmer, and the farmer bit a cow; but what was most extraordinary, each conveyed his peculiar quality to the other; for the hog barked like a dog, the farmer grunted like a hog, and the cow did her best to talk like the farmer. Something like this disposition, he supposed, must have been in inanimate things also, by the honourable gentleman's looking so carefully after property; for unless an instance had occurred of furniture behaving in a disorderly manner, or a dumb waiter's barking, in consequence of the hydrophobia, he conceived such a phrase could not have been introduced. Much more in the same sarcastic vein followed, with some judicious objections to the motion, on the general ground of policy and humanity, which ended in its rejection.

Parliament being dissolved on the twentieth of May, Mr. Sheridan repaired to Stafford, where he was re-elected without opposition, and where he certainly enjoyed great popularity.

Not long before this he became concerned in some degree in an affair which made an uncommon noise, and excited a very lively interest for the time among literary enquirers. This was the pretended discovery of numerous papers, purporting to have been the original autographs of Shakespeare, and deeds appertaining to his family. The mass was large, and the variety of contents such



as to render the fabrication one of the most extraordinary in the history of impostures. Mr. Samuel Ireland, in whose possession these relics were, had the reputation of being a man of taste; but what gave the whole an air of suspicion was the concealment of the source from whence he drew these invaluable treasures.

Men of letters crowded to inspect the pretended relics of the immortal bard; and some of the most learned men in the kingdom gave an unqualified assent to their authenticity. Among these multifarious papers was an entire copy of the tragedy of *Lear*, and an original play never heard of before, upon the Saxon history of *Vortigern* and *Rowena*. For this last piece, the proprietors of *Drury Lane Theatre* entered into an agreement, with the intention of bringing it out that season; and if any reliance is to be placed upon the declaration of the young man, with whom the whole fabrication originated, Mr. Sheridan was no less a believer in the legitimacy of the papers than his old friend and tutor, *Dr. Parr*. As the history of this transaction is of itself curious, and connected with the subject of these *Memoirs*, some account of the negociation for the play, and the circumstances attending its exhibition, may be amusing to the reader.

In the narrative of the forgery, published by the younger Ireland, he says, that being considerably under eighteen when he wrote the *Play of Vortigern*, he was so unacquainted with the proper

length of a drama, as to be compelled to count the number of lines in one of Shakspeare's plays, and on that standard to frame his own. The piece which he chose happening to be uncommonly long, his consequently became so likewise ; and when completed, it contained above two thousand eight hundred lines. Upon observing this, Mr. Sheridan remarked that the purchase was at any rate a good one, as there were two plays and a half instead of one.

But the agreement, it is said, did not take place without much enquiry and many conversations ; in one of which, when the elder Ireland had been very lavish in his encomiums upon the poet, Mr. Sheridan remarked, if we are to believe what has been narrated by the principal in this extraordinary affair, that however high Shakspeare might stand in the estimation of the public in general, he did not, for his part, regard him in that exalted light, although he allowed the brilliancy of his ideas and the penetration of his mind.

Notwithstanding this criticism upon the poetical character of Shakspeare, it appears that Mr. Sheridan was not without some apprehensions about the value of the bargain which he was making ; for we are told, that, previous to the signing of the agreement, he and Richardson went to inspect the fair copy of the play which had been made from the manuscript. After perusing several pages, Mr. Sheridan came to one line which was not strictly

correct, upon which, turning to Mr. Ireland, he remarked : " This is rather strange ; for though you are acquainted with my opinion as to Shakspeare, yet, be it as it may, he certainly always wrote poetry." Having perused a few pages further, he again paused, and laying down the manuscript, spoke to the following effect : " There are certainly some bold ideas ; but they are crude and undigested. It is very odd ; one would think that Shakspeare must have been very young when he wrote the play. As to the doubting whether it be really his, or not, who can possibly look at the papers and not believe them ancient ?"

After some procrastination, the terms for the purchase were settled, by which it was agreed that Mr. Sheridan should pay down three hundred pounds, and that the profits of the performance for the first sixty nights should be equally divided between the proprietors of the theatre and Mr. Ireland, after deducting the necessary expenses. Public expectation was very much on the alert when the play was announced ; and at the time of its performance every seat in the boxes had been previously taken, so that many, after paying full prices for the first places, were obliged to descend into the pit. Suspicions, however, had already gathered strong against the validity of the piece as the genuine offspring of the poet whose name it bore, and these increased rapidly during the representation, till Mr. Kemble, who personated Vortigern, by his

emphatic delivery of one fatal line, put the finishing stroke to the solemn mockery of the farce. The passage which gave the death-blow to this exquisite piece of mummery was a bombastic description of death, and such an one as neither the actor could pronounce, nor the audience listen to, without laughter. Yet we are assured that Mr. Sheridan was much displeased on this occasion, and said that he had nothing to do with the private piques and animosities of Mr. Kemble, or whether he approved of the manuscripts or not; that he regarded that gentleman merely as a servant of the theatre; and that it was consequently his duty to have exerted himself to the utmost for the benefit of his employers.

Here, perhaps, another anecdote may be properly introduced on the same authority. The author of this singular imposition, which undoubtedly evinced equal ingenuity and industry, says that at an early period of his life he imbibed a fondness for theatrical pursuits, which was increased by his performance in a private play, exhibited at the house of Mr. Sheridan, in Bruton Street. The piece selected on that occasion was the opera of the Gentle Shepherd, which was followed by *Bon-Ton*, and the parts were filled by young persons.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

*Negotiations for Peace, and their Failure.—Motion of Censure against Mr. Pitt.—Sarcastic Reflection of Mr. Wilberforce.—Motion Respecting the Imprisonment of La Fayette.—Mr. Sheridan's extravagant Character of that General.—Distressed State of the Country.—Stoppage of the Bank.—Jocularities of Mr. Sheridan on that Subject.—Altercation with Mr. Rose.—Mutiny in the Channel Fleet.—Noble Conduct of Mr. Sheridan on that Occasion.—His Speech on Mr. Grey's Motion for Parliamentary Reform.*

THE sincerity of the British cabinet, in its pacific professions, was manifested so clearly by the negotiations which took place with the heads of the French government, and the sending over Lord Malmesbury to treat with them at Paris, that even Mr. Fox could not help giving his approbation to ministers for their conduct in this instance, and saying that they deserved universal support. Mr. Sheridan also signified his acquiescence in the resolutions brought forward by Mr. Pitt, for providing a more effective force to defend the country in consequence of the threats of invasion held out by the enemy. This spirit of conciliation and candour, however, was of ephemeral duration; for Mr. Fox, in a debate on the cavalry bill, the object of

which was to raise a body of local troops to serve for internal defence, launched out again into an attack upon ministers, for which he was severely censured in his turn by Mr. Ryder, who stated that the speech which he had just heard was such as might have composed a manifesto for a French general on the invasion of Ireland. This drew upon the ministerial advocate the whole weight of Mr. Sheridan's eloquence; and not content with eulogizing his friend to the skies, as the most exalted and enlightened of patriots, he exhibited, by way of contrast, the most disgusting picture of the men in power, who were, he said, begrimed and black with infamy, defeated by their enemies, and degraded in the eyes of all Europe. But the whole fury of the party was collected and discharged soon after, on a motion made by Mr. Fox, for a vote of censure upon Mr. Pitt, in having advanced money to the Emperor of Germany without the consent of parliament.

The circumstances attending this charge were rather curious, for the whole arose out of the information given by Mr. Pitt himself, when, in stating to the house the particulars relating to the supplies, he observed, that during the vacancy after the dissolution of parliament, the pressing exigency of the emperor's affairs had rendered immediate assistance from this country indispensably necessary. This was accordingly granted; and by that means our ally had been enabled to carry on his military operations.

rations with vigour, which otherwise must have been paralysed. At the time when this communication was made to the house, not the smallest notice was taken of it by those who were so vigilant on all occasions to raise an outcry against the malversations of ministers, and their infractions of the constitution. After some time however had elapsed, Mr. Fox gave notice of a motion, that ministers, in granting a loan to the emperor, without the consent of parliament, had been guilty of a high crime and misdemeanour. This tremendous threat he accompanied with the scandalous expression, that he hoped the subject would be taken up without doors; which conveyed as plain an encouragement to the people in favour of resistance and outrage, as another declaration which he made about the same time, that under existing circumstances the constitution was not worth fighting for. The object upon whom all this tempest was poured, remained, however, as unmoved, amidst the pealing elements of denunciation, invective, and menace, as a rock of adamant; and with perfect coolness urged his adversary to put all his threatenings into immediate execution. Mr. Fox carried his enmity, upon this occasion, to such a length, that while the country was in danger of being attacked by the enemy, he exerted himself with the utmost diligence to prevent the granting of the supplies necessary for its defence; though the minister solemnly adjured him not to commit so flagrant an

injury in that momentous period, but to reserve all his vengeance for the promised season of formal accusation, and the devoted object of his animosity.

On the fourteenth of December, the charge was brought forward in a regular motion, which was seconded by Mr. Alderman Combe, in compliance, as he said, with the instructions of his constituents, who, at a public meeting, had prejudged a question on which they could have no information, and found the minister guilty upon the reports of newspapers and the vociferous declamations of ignorant orators. Mr. Pitt, so far from shrinking under the accumulated torrent, stood bold in his integrity, the conscious rectitude of his intentions, and the justice of the transaction which had raised all this storm. He admitted the fact, and acknowledged his responsibility to the fullest extent which his enemies could maintain; after which, he became the assailant in his turn, by proving that what Mr. Fox now condemned with so much vehemence he had himself practised when in place. He also proved, by reference to history, that this act, which was so severely branded as a novelty equally unknown and dangerous, had been adopted on various occasions, from the beginning of the reign of Anne to that of George II.; but he scorned to shelter himself under the authority of precedents; he justified the principle, and claimed praise for that which his adversaries alleged against him as a crime. So convincing were his arguments, and candid his state-



ments, that, in several instances, members who came down with hesitating minds, and some actually prepared to vote for the proposed censure, became converts to what they were satisfied was the triumph of truth and for the benefit of the public. An amendment to the motion was made and carried, which not only took away its sting; but changed it into a resolution, approving of what had been done as a justifiable and proper exercise of the discretion vested in His Majesty's ministers by the vote of credit, and calculated to produce consequences which had proved highly advantageous to the common cause, and to the general interests of Europe. On the motion thus amended, Mr. Sheridan animadverted with keen severity, exhausting all the stores of his wit and humour to expose the conduct of the minister, and the weakness of those who had been overcome by his commanding eloquence. He defended his honourable friend, Alderman Combe, who had come down instructed not to hear reason, and to act upon his own judgment, but to vote according to the dictates of a Common Hall; and after running hastily over the precedents which had been cited by Mr. Pitt, he concluded with an apostrophe to the shade of the venerable and illustrious Chatham, contemplating the public conduct of his son with indignation. "Of all the ministers that ever directed the affairs of this country," said Mr. Sheridan, "the right honourable gentleman was the man who had em-

ployed in his administration the worst of means, and entailed upon his country the greatest of evils. If two motives could be assigned for his conduct ; if it could be said on the one hand that he might be guided by views of power and sentiments of ambition, or by feelings of patriotism and virtue, he should not hesitate to ascribe the former to a minister whose whole life had marked the same total disregard for one as implicit devotion to the other."

From some words which dropped in this speech, about his regard for the morals of gentlemen who gave their support to the minister, Mr. Wilberforce was induced to consider the application as intended for himself, on which account he very solemnly rose to assure Mr. Sheridan that he did not thank him for the proffered service, as he wished his morals to be left to shift for themselves, without having the honour of his countenance.

Two days after this, General Fitzpatrick, in a long and eloquent speech, moved an address to His Majesty, the object of which was that he would exert himself in procuring the release of La Fayette, and two other French prisoners, then confined in the Castle of Olmutz. This motion was seconded briefly by Mr. Sheridan ; and when Mr. Wilberforce moved an amendment, which made only some slight alteration in the verbal construction of it, he entered more at large into the subject, descanting as he went along very sarcastically upon the silence of his friend Windham,

whose tongue, he said, was bound by the same cause as the emperor's hands; and the house knew pretty well who was the gaoler. As a friend to freedom, he added, that he should heartily rejoice when General La Fayette recovered his liberty; and as an old friend of Mr. Windham, he should feel no small satisfaction when he recovered his speech. He was sure, also, that he would not find the house like the adder, which is deaf to the voice of the charmer. After bestowing some sharp invectives against the British ministry in general for their conduct towards foreign powers, no less than for their arbitrary proceedings at home, he concluded with a very animated eulogy upon La Fayette, who, it was said, united the spirit of a Hampden to the loyalty of a Falkland, which panegyric only wanted truth to have rendered an elegant comparison. The motion, however, was withdrawn, and the amendment rejected.

The political horizon at the close of this year was exceedingly inauspicious, and presented nothing that could afford a satisfactory prospect either to the government or the public. The reduction of the funds was a pretty sure criterion of the decline of the national credit, or of the contagious influence of despondency; and as appearances of a very alarming nature were indicated in different parts of the empire, it was not much to be wondered that a great run ensued upon the Bank for payments in cash. This pressure upon

public credit was increased by the apprehension of an invasion; so that altogether ministers found themselves placed in circumstances of extreme difficulty, and which called for measures of uncommon energy to prevent greater calamity.

With the concurrence of the directors of the Bank, an order of council was made, prohibiting the issue of any more cash in payment, till the sense of parliament could be taken on the subject. As the necessary result of this proceeding, a message from the King, accompanied by the order, was delivered to the House of Commons on the twenty-seventh of February. Mr. Pitt then moved for a committee of secrecy to ascertain the necessity of the case, and to examine into the affairs of the Bank of England. From all that had recently occurred, it was not to be supposed that the opposition would remain silent on an occasion that presented such ample food for remark and censure. Mr. Fox, as might have been expected, repeated the old charge that the nation was in a state of absolute ruin, and that the executive government had, by the late order, annihilated all public property. He made no difference between the suspension of payment in cash for a limited period, to prevent national bankruptcy, and the fraudulent refusal to pay either the interest or the principal of the public debts. Having assumed that the act which had been resorted to in the present instance was nothing short of robbery, he reproached



the minister with having exceeded the French in unprincipled rapacity and breach of faith. He demanded an open exposure of the affairs of the Bank, in acceding to which it was easy to see that nothing could have ensued to the advantage of the nation, or the removal of existing evils, but that such a measure was directly calculated to increase the difficulties of that great establishment, if not to accelerate its absolute destruction.

Mr. Sheridan went over the same ground, and contended that the embarrassments of the Bank were to be attributed only to the prodigality of ministers in sending money out of the country for the support of the war. He moved first for an extension of the enquiry into all the concerns of the Bank, with the causes which led to the order in council; but his propositions were rejected; and when the committee was about to be chosen, he entertained the house by anticipating the list of names, which happening to correspond exactly with those afterwards selected, occasioned not a little merriment. In conclusion, he begged pardon for being jocular on so grave a subject; but even amidst the wreck of public credit, and on the brink of the country's ruin, it was impossible, he said, not to laugh at the juggling tricks and miserable shifts to which ministers had recourse, to screen themselves from punishment.

Something having fallen from Mr. Dundas about the charge of managing ballots for committees, and

vindicating himself from the imputation of corruption, Mr. Sheridan observed, that the right honourable gentleman had got away from school; had even gone through the political universities, and had since educated a number of young gentlemen in political learning, so that he was not only a scholar, but a master of scholars. Indeed, the right honourable gentleman's innocence reminded him of a line in one of Dryden's plays, where King Arthur falls in love with the appearance of a beautiful young lady, and Merlin, the enchanter, coming to remove the spell, exclaims:

“ Behold the maiden modesty of Grimbald.”

In a subsequent debate on the same subject, he introduced a very whimsical personification of the Bank, by representing her as an elderly lady in the city, of great credit and long standing, who had lately made a faux pas, which was not altogether inexcusable. She had unfortunately fallen into bad company, and contracted too great an intimacy at the west end of the town. The young gentleman, however, who had employed all his arts of soft persuasion to seduce this old lady, had so far shewn his designs, that by timely breaking off the connexion, there might be some hopes that the matron would once more regain her credit, and repair her injured reputation.

A motion brought forward by Mr. Harrison for the reduction of useless places, sinecures, exor-

bitant fees, and other modes of retrenchment in the expenditure of public money, gave rise to some altercation between Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Rose; the former having asserted that the latter enjoyed upwards of ten thousand a year from several places, the duties of some of which were executed by deputy. This statement was flatly contradicted by Mr. Rose, who accused his antagonist with having been guilty of a deliberate falsehood; and that as he had formerly made the same charge and received a complete refutation, it was his duty to have instituted proper enquiries into the subject, before he presumed to repeat what had no foundation in truth. He proved that three of the offices mentioned by Mr. Sheridan he did not possess, and that one he never had enjoyed. The income, also, he avowed to be monstrously exaggerated, and concluded with observing, that he had as much right to hold a sinecure place as Mr. Fox, who had made no scruple of reposing himself in three, even when he was in administration. Mr. Sheridan, in explanation, said that he did not mean any harsh reflections upon the honourable gentleman, who was a person of great application and industry; but that he had only stated facts such as he understood them, and concluded with remarking, that though Mr. Rose had disproved some points, he had not stated the exact amount of his income under government. This, to make the best of it, was a very lame apology, and so far

from being any justification, only heightened the offence, by shewing how much more ready he was to bring forward charges of crimination, than to enquire into the grounds of what he affirmed. Mr. Fox, however, was still more imprudent, because by his violence against others, he brought upon himself the severest retorts in regard to the sinecures which he held, and his sale of the reversions to pay a gambling debt.

The motion was lost, after all this personal contest, which cannot be revived without pain, as being extremely disgraceful; betraying equal inconsistency and want of liberality, whatever grounds there might have been for complaints of the neglect of public economy in a time of unexampled distress.

While these feuds prevailed in the great council of the nation, and every thing was done to embarrass the government and to increase its difficulties, when ingenuity was continually employed to discover small things to impede the progress of ministers, even in their pursuit of the blessing of peace, which all parties professed to have for their object—while every contrivance was resorted to for the purpose of lowering the throne itself in the estimation of the people, the elements of rebellion suddenly exploded in that quarter which constituted the rampart of the empire. The seeds of disaffection had been secretly sown in the navy by emissaries, who entered into the service for the



purpose of perverting the seamen to revolutionary doctrines, and bringing them to co-operate with those who had no other aim in view than the establishment of a republic, upon the model of what had taken place in France under its worst changes.

The system of delegation was artfully introduced into the several ships; and so well was the whole scheme planned, that its existence escaped even suspicion, till the spirit of discontent broke forth early in the year in petitions to Lord Howe on the subject of grievances. The gallant veteran, observing some unaccountable symptoms in these applications, which were far from being characteristic of the open bluntness that has ever distinguished the language and proceedings of English sailors, thought the matter worth particular enquiry; but upon the most diligent inspection no signs of confederacy could be discovered, and the business ended for that time. But when orders were issued for the fleet to weigh from Portsmouth, the mutinous spirit broke forth in the unanimous declaration, passed from one ship to another, that not a sail should be unfurled till they had procured a complete redress of grievances. All attempts to bring these misguided men to a sense of their duty and danger were unavailing; and the delegates having obtained the complete command, proceeded to draw up a petition to the House of Commons, in which they complained of the disproportion between the pay of the army and

that of the navy, with other particulars in which they conceived themselves aggrieved. In their petition to the Admiralty, they stated many more articles of complaint, and demanded redress in terms so provokingly insolent, as to indicate more of the ferocious manner of insurgents, having the overthrow of government for their object, than the rough simplicity of plain men, looking with respect to the supreme authority for the relief of their common wants, and the removal of their particular hardships.

The Admiralty lost no time in endeavouring to put a stop to these portentous proceedings, and, by their commissioners, made such proposals as were calculated to satisfy any reasonable expectation. But concession only served to inflame the mutineers, and to increase their demands. They insisted upon innovations in the service, and the extension of new regulations to the seamen employed by the India Company, and the merchants in general. In short, they seemed to have lost sight of the object on which they originally set out, and to have thought that it lay in their power to bring the government to a compliance with the most extravagant conditions.

At length something like order was restored by the acquiescence of the delegates in the proposals imparted to them for an increase of pay : but soon afterwards the refractory spirit burst forth again in the ships at the Nore, where the crews displayed

a still worse disposition than what had been evinced by their brethren at the western ports.

When nothing could persuade these turbulent and deluded men to abandon the rebellious and ruinous course in which they had embarked, government found it necessary to issue a proclamation, offering pardon to those who would return to their duty; and causing the buoys to be taken up at the mouth of the Thames, that the mutineers might be prevented either from entering the river, or sailing away to an enemy's coast, as they threatened.

Nothing could be more awful than the state of the country under such dreadful circumstances; but by promptitude in adopting proper means of defence, and cutting off communications between the shore and the desperadoes, schism arose among the seamen, and in a short time the majority of them submitted, while their ringleaders were seized and punished.

During these disgraceful transactions, of which information was of course communicated to parliament by a message from the throne, some attempts were made to fasten blame upon Mr. Pitt, for procrastination in the business, particularly in neglecting to bring the subject before the house at an earlier period, when the dangers that had resulted from the delay might have been prevented. Such was the substance of the motion brought forward by Mr. Whitbread in the shape of a spe-

cific charge against Mr. Pitt; but when it was found that there was equal inaccuracy and injustice in accusing him of an omission of duty, where he had less influence than in any department of the state, the motion was so worded, with more regard to consistency, indeed, but with little liberality, as to convey a sweeping censure upon the whole executive body of government.

Mr. Sheridan supported the motion with great vehemence; and the negotiations which took place between the commissioners of the Admiralty, and the malcontents, were stigmatized by him as deficient in candour and sincerity. But while he was thus ready to go with his party in censuring administration, he acted with infinitely greater credit than any of his colleagues, by coming forward boldly and energetically to express his disapprobation of the conduct which had been pursued by the insurgents; and which he truly described as unfair and inconsistent with the brave, generous, and open character of British seamen. He observed also that he entertained no doubt but there had been a foul interference with them, and means of the basest nature used to induce them to take the steps which they had adopted. If men were oppressed, they ought to be relieved by their country; but however just their complaints might be, they ought to complain in a regular way. Should there be men among them, as he believed there were, who advised the sailors to put their



country into such peril as it stood in at that moment, for the mere purpose of carrying their objects, such men he hesitated not in pronouncing to be the worst of traitors. He suspected that there were persons of this description; and the evil was of the most alarming kind, when the enemy were actually preparing to attack us in the most formidable manner. He thought that listening to the suggestions of such foes to this country would never have been the fault of the brave British seamen.

This open and judicious declaration of his sentiments was extremely well calculated to produce a good effect upon the public at large, and, what was of still more importance, upon the minds of the unhappy men who were then the dupes of the most pernicious incendiaries. That it excited attention among the sailors, appeared shortly afterwards in a printed appeal to the nation, complaining of misrepresentation, and stating the supposed grievances of the navy. This paper was printed at Portsmouth by order of the delegates; but, as Mr. Sheridan observed, the language was more like that of a circulating library than of the fore-castle.

Having given a cursory account of the transactions in the fleet, it adverted in strong terms of exclamation to the observations which had been thrown out in the House of Commons by the man who was considered as the seaman's friend. This paper Mr. Sheridan read in the house, and not only animadverted upon it with great animation,

but in vindicating himself from the charge of being the enemy of seamen, he did equal justice to government. Whatever had been at any period proposed in this house, he said, for the benefit of the seamen, had been adopted not only with readiness but almost with acclamation. Then alluding to Mr. Dundas, who was not present, he observed that the right honourable gentleman had on many occasions brought questions before the house, for the advantage of the seamen, which had been acquiesced in with the same satisfaction that they were proposed. In conclusion, Mr. Sheridan thus addressed the Speaker, "Sir, I cannot instance a greater proof of my endeavours to promote the advantage of the seamen, than that in the year 1786 a gentleman did twice bring in a bill which I afterwards renewed for their benefit; and though the principles of such bills were objected to, it did happen that they had for their object the redress of those grievances which have of late been the subject of complaint. I have ever been their friend, but never more so than at this period, in warning them against those artifices which have been practised to seduce them. When people tell them that the navy can be managed without subordination, they may as well tell them a ship can be managed without a rudder: they had better, indeed, pull down the shrouds and the masts, and lay them on the deck, than listen to such misrepresentation."

On a subsequent day, when the royal message

was taken into consideration, recommending the adoption of some means for the prevention and punishment of all attempts to excite sedition and mutiny in the navy, though Mr. Sheridan expressed his doubts respecting the policy of multiplying penal statutes, he very patriotically declined breaking the unanimity of the house on that occasion, and made some observations, which did equal honour to his judgment and his candour. The fatal perseverance in the mutiny, he said, had placed the country in a perilous situation; and no person could feel more indignation against the foul incendiaries who had caused it than himself. He was, at first, induced to think that the mutineers had acted under the impulse of momentary delusion and mistake; but their subsequent and continued conduct convinced him that something more than delusion had operated on their minds, and that a rooted spirit of disobedience had taken place of those manly and loyal sentiments with which they had been on former occasions constantly animated. If there was, indeed, a rot in the wooden walls of old England, our decay could not be very far distant. The question, as it evidently appeared in his view, was not about this or that concession, but whether the country should be laid prostrate at the feet of France. It was, in fact, a matter of no moment whether it was laid prostrate at the feet of monarchial or republican France; for still the event would be equally fatal,

and equally destructive. The national commerce would necessarily prove the great object of the enemy's vengeance; and those mistaken men, who might be instrumental in producing so dreadful a crisis, would suffer most essentially in their dearest interests.

Throughout the whole of this critical and distressing period, Mr. Sheridan displayed great magnanimity of mind, and a spirit so superior to that of party, as to command the admiration of the public, and the esteem of those who differed from him radically on general politics. He received many compliments on the occasion, both in and out of the house, which induced him, when supporting a motion made by Mr. Grey for parliamentary reform, to glance at the subject, and to make some remarks upon the accusations which had at several times been brought against him, of being associated with men who were desirous of promoting anarchy. Having repelled this foul charge with becoming indignation, he asked what provocation had he to excite any opposition against the aristocracy of this land, or against its monarchy. He had formerly possessed some confidence from the sovereign during the time when he filled an office of considerable trust. He had been honoured with the confidence of an illustrious personage. He had been treated with civility by many of the first families in this country. He knew no occasion he had to regret the attention



he had received from that house. He had no desire to break a lance with any orator in another place. He therefore expected credit for his sincerity, when he declared that he supported the motion of reform with his heart, because he thought, in his conscience, it tended to restore to the people some of the purity of their original excellent constitution, and to save the state from ruin.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

*Meeting of Parliament.—Secession of Mr. Fox and his Party.—Their re-appearance, and renewed Hostility.—Wit of Mr. Sheridan on financial Subjects.—His eloquent and patriotic Speech on the threatened Invasion.—Compliments of Mr. Pitt.—Scepticism of Mr. Sheridan, in regard to Conspiracies.—His Eulogy on Arthur O'Connor.—Trials at Maidstone, and the Consequence.—Prosecution of Lord Thanet and others for a Riot.—Evidence of Mr. Sheridan.—Opposition to the Employment of the English Militia in Ireland.*

AFTER a prorogation of about four months, parliament re-assembled early in November; but the opposition members did not make their appearance, having given notice of an intention to secede from the discharge of public duty, as the representatives of the nation, on the failure of Mr. Grey's motion in the preceding session. It is not very easy to account on what principles such a conduct could be justified, because, if one minority can claim the right to absent themselves from the house, merely because they are not able to carry their point, another set of men may do the same, and thus the great business of the nation would be exposed to ruin by the caprice of men, who, neglecting to watch over its progress, would

have nothing to do afterwards but to criminate those who had profited by their want of timely vigilance. An opposition in parliament is necessary to prevent the abuse of power; but if they who are in that rank shall be permitted to withdraw from the house whenever they please, and merely because they cannot carry their own measures, the very object of the national inquest is destroyed; and they who are deputed to look after ministers assume to themselves a right of abandoning their trust, without returning it back into the hands of those from whom they originally received it. At last, however, Mr. Fox and his friends did condescend to come down to the house; but it was only to throw what obstacles they could in the way of the necessary supplies. It had been found expedient, after the extraordinary occurrences of the year, and particularly by the increased expenses of the navy, to make a considerable advance upon the assessed taxes. The opposition on this occasion came forward in a body to prevent, as they said, the grant of one shilling to the ministers, whose dismissal they represented as indispensable for the attainment of peace. This was the language of Mr. Fox; and it was echoed with extraordinary fervour by his adherents, though all of them were sensible that exertions had recently been made to effect that which they pretended to be their primary object; and they knew also that the efforts had failed

solely through the inordinate ambition and extravagant demands of the French government. Hostility to ministers alone, therefore, must have been the cause of this secession and pertinacity: but surely nothing could be more absurd than for a very small body, like that which now made up the strength of the party, to expect the surrender of the government into their hands, when the preponderance of members in both houses lay with those whom they wished to supplant. Mr. Sheridan made a very curious apology for himself and his friends, on being ironically welcomed as strangers to the house by Mr. Yorke; for after thanking the honourable gentleman with equal politeness, he said, that his absence rested entirely with his own conscience and feelings, and was to be canvassed only by himself and his constituents; so that, according to this doctrine, the House of Commons can have no right to enforce attendance in any case; and every member may indulge his ease, or his humour, by neglecting his senatorial duties, whenever he shall think proper. While the opposition were absent, an address, as usual, had been moved and carried, promising His Majesty that his faithful Commons would support him to the utmost, and stand or fall with their religion, laws, and liberties. Now, it is evident that the unanimity with which this pledge was given arose from the secession of Mr. Fox and his party; and yet Mr. Sheridan, most unaccount-



ably, accused ministers of having entrapped the house into this address by a trick, though, if there was any truth in the assertion, he and his colleagues were doubly guilty in suffering such a trick to pass, when it was their duty to have attended, and prevented it. In his observations on the financial measure which Mr. Pitt was compelled to adopt, he took a survey of the state of the country; and, as usual, went over the old objections to the war, maintaining that it might have been amicably settled, if the ministers had been equally sincere with the French: but the most singular feature of all in his speeches on this occasion was the assertion that the war was continued solely for the purpose of keeping nine worthless ministers in their places; when, in truth, those ministers never stood firm in the public estimation, which was a plain proof that the war, in spite of the declamation, was a popular one, notwithstanding all the disasters which had attended it, and the heavy burthens which it induced.

But neither the impassioned eloquence of Mr. Sheridan, nor the violence of Mr. Fox, could make any impression upon the house, where the bill, which they so strenuously opposed, passed triumphantly; and that, perhaps, the more so on account of their extraordinary dereliction of parliamentary duty in one instance, and breach of promise in another, since it was in the recollection of every body, that, at the beginning of the preceding

session, they had given government an unequivocal assurance of support, if the French rulers should refuse to come to terms of accommodation. The trial had been fully made in the interim ; and so far were the heads of that country disposed to make peace, that they behaved the more insolent, in proportion to the overtures which were made on the part of Great Britain. Notwithstanding these facts, the opposition renewed their political warfare with increased animosity, and endeavoured, as far as they could, to stop all the supplies that were indispensably necessary for the ordinary business of the state.

There was a littleness of mind in all this, which too plainly indicated that personal enmity, and not the public good, constituted the ruling principle of these eminent men in their hostility to the measures of government. The wit of Mr. Sheridan was a poor substitute for plain dealing ; and though he frequently threw his hearers into a fit of good humour by his jokes, and whimsical comparisons, men of reflecting minds could not help being sometimes disgusted at the unseasonableness of his sallies.

On a former occasion he exhibited a singular prosopopœia in describing the Bank, under the form of a demure matron, playing the coquette with the minister. Pleased, perhaps, with the effect which this figure had produced, he ventured to bring it forward the second time, in the discus-

sion of the bill for increasing the assessed taxes. "Last year," said he, "much was said in the newspapers about the connexion between the chancellor of the exchequer and the Bank. It was asserted that the banns had been forbidden. The conduct of the right honourable gentleman, indeed, shewed that he cultivated the alliance on account of the lady's dowry, and not for the comfort of her society. At first the affair seemed to wear the appearance of a penitent seduction; but now it has degenerated into a contented prostitution. The country wished to forgive the indiscretion, on the hopes of amendment; but what had produced the infatuation it was not easy to conjecture, unless the right honourable gentleman had given the old lady love-powder. The heyday of the blood was over; but the rankness of passion had not subsided, for the dear deceiver was taken again into favour, and the ruin he had occasioned was forgotten."

This was in a committee, the chairman of which was Mr. Bragge, now Mr. Bathurst; and the orator being in the punning vein, was determined to keep up the mirth which he had excited. Alluding to the stoppage of cash payments at the Bank, Mr. Sheridan said, without meaning any quibble on the name of the honourable chairman, the conduct of the chancellor of the exchequer reminded him of an old proverb. The report of the committee was very favourable; but still the Bank must be kept under confinement: "Brag is a good dog," says the mi-

nister, “but Holdfast is a better:” and the Bank must be kept under his tutelage till he finds it convenient to set the directors at liberty.

Amusing as these effusions of a lively fancy are even in the retrospective view of political conflicts, we contemplate Mr. Sheridan with more satisfaction in his endeavours to rouse the energy of his countrymen, and to inspire them with a spirit of resistance to the threats of invasion. A message, containing information to that effect, being brought down to the house on the twenty-sixth of April, 1798, he came forward, and with the same manliness which he had evinced at the time of the mutiny, expressed his wish that something might be done by the house to kindle the zeal and animate the courage of the people. He began with lamenting the supineness which so generally prevailed in that season of danger, and which apathy he feelingly attributed not to the want of loyalty or patriotism, but to a disbelief of the impending perils; and this appeared, he said, in the slow progress of the voluntary contributions, to which measure he was a sincere friend. He was, however, of opinion, that notwithstanding this apparent indifference, such was the spirit of the country, that no sooner should a drop of English blood be spilt by a Frenchman on English ground, but that English valour would rise to a pitch equal to what its most sanguine friends could expect or its warmest admirers desire.



After declaring that he did not retract what he had formerly advanced on the revolution in France, he proceeded to draw a most glowing picture of the unprincipled character of that country under its republican regime.

“ If the French,” said he, “ are determined to invade us, they will, no doubt, come furnished with flaming manifestoes. The directory will probably instruct their generals to make the fairest professions of the manner in which their army will act ; but of these professions surely no one can be believed. Some, however, may deceive themselves by supposing that the great Buonaparte will have concerted with the directory that he is not to tarnish his laurels, or sully his glory, by permitting his soldiers to plunder our banks, to ruin our commerce, to enslave our people ; but that he is to come, like a minister of grace, with no other purpose than to give peace to the cottager, to restore citizens to their rights, to establish real freedom, and a liberal and humane government. This undoubtedly were noble ; this were generous ; this, I had almost said, were god-like. But can there be supposed an Englishman so stupid, so besotted, so befooled, as to give a moment’s credit to such ridiculous professions ? Not that I deny but that a great republic may be actuated by these generous principles, and by a thirst of glory for glory’s sake. Such, I might be induced to believe, was the spirit which inspired the Romans in the early and vir-

tuous periods of their republic. They fought and conquered for the meed of warlike renown. Still, sooner would I believe that the Spartan heroes fought for fame only, and not for the plunder of wealth and luxury, which they were more ready to exclude from than to introduce into the bosom of their republic. But far otherwise are we to interpret the objects that whet the valour and stimulate the prowess of modern republicans. Do we not see they have planted the tree of liberty in the garden of monarchy, where it still continues to produce the same rare and luxurious fruit? Do we not see the French republicans as eager as ever were the courtly friends of the monarchy, to collect from among the vanquished countries, and to accumulate all the elegancies, all the monuments of the arts and sciences; determined to make their capital the luxurious mart and school for a subject and admiring world? It is not glory they seek, for they are already gorged with it; it is not territory they grasp at, they are already encumbered with the extent they have acquired. What, then, is their object? They come for what they really want; they come for ships, for commerce, for credit, and for capital. Yes, they come for the sinews, the bones, for the marrow, and for the very heart's blood of Great Britain. But now," said Mr. Sheridan, "let us examine what we are to purchase at this price. It is natural for a merchant to look closely to the quality of the article which he is

about to buy at a high rate. Liberty, it appears, is now their staple commodity ; but should we not carefully attend, whether what they export be not of the same kind with what they keep for their home consumption. Attend, I say, and examine how little of real liberty they themselves enjoy, who are so forward and prodigal in bestowing it on others. On this subject I do not touch as a matter of reproach. The unjust measures they have pursued they may have pursued from necessity. If the majority of the French people are desirous and determined to continue a republican form of government, the directory must do what they can to secure the republic. This conduct both prudence, policy, and a view to their own security, may dictate and enforce. But were they to perform the fair promises which they would fain hold-out to us, they would then establish more liberty here than they themselves enjoy in France. Were they to leave us the trial by jury uninterrupted, and thus grant us a constitution more enviable than their own, would not this be rearing a fabric here which would stand as a glaring contrast, and prove a lasting reproach to their own country ?”

Towards the conclusion of this most eloquent and patriotic speech, which united the warmth of Demosthenes with the nerve of Cicero, the orator touched upon the best means of opposing a successful resistance to an enemy of this temper and disposition. “ I will not,” said he, “ here require

of ministers to lay aside their political prejudices or animosities ; neither will I require of those who oppose them altogether to suspend their's ; but both must feel that this sacrifice is necessary, at least, on one point, resistance to the enemy, and upon this subject I must intreat them to accord ; for here it is necessary that they should both act with one heart and one hand. If there be any who say we will oppose the French when we have succeeded in removing the present ministers, to them I would say :--“ Sirs, let us defer that for a moment ; let us now oppose the enemy and avert the storm, otherwise we shall not long have even ministers to combat and remove.” If there be any who say that ministers have brought our present calamities on us, and that they ought, therefore, to be first removed, I will grant them that there is justice and logic in the argument ; but its policy I am at a loss to discover. There are those who think the present ministers incapable, and that they should on that account be displaced. Granted : but if they cannot succeed in removing them, and if they be sincere in their opinion of the incapacity of ministers, how can they approve themselves sincere in their wish to resist the enemy, unless they contribute to aid and rectify the incapacity of which they complain ? There are, however, some gentlemen who seem to divide their enmity and opposition between ministers and the French ; but do they not see that



the inevitable consequence of this division must be the conquest of the country? Why then do they thus hesitate about which side of the question they ought to take? Can there be any thing more childish than to say, I will wait until the enemy has landed, and then I will resist them; as if preparation was no essential part of effectual resistance. What more childish and ridiculous than to say, I will take a pistol and fire at them; but I will not go the length of a musket; no: I will attack them with my left, but I will not exert my right hand against them? All must unite, all must go every length against them, or there can be no hopes; and already I rejoice to see the necessary spirit begin to rise throughout the country and the metropolis: and when on this side of the house we manifest this spirit, and forget all other motives to action, I trust the same sentiments will prevail on the other; and that the offers we make sincerely will be accepted unreluctantly. But now I must observe, that the defence of the country might be essentially aided by two very different classes of men; the one composed of those sturdy, hulking fellows whom we daily see behind coaches, or following through the streets and squares their masters and mistresses, who, in the mean time, perhaps, are ruminating on the evils of an invasion; to such I would entrust the defence of the capital, and would add to them the able bodied men which the different offices might easily pro-

duce. There is another class I would also beg leave to mention; and those are young gentlemen of high rank, who are daily mounted on horses of high blood. They surely, at this perilous moment, might be better employed; though it would ill become me to erect myself into a rigid censor of amusement and dissipation. That line of argument would not exactly suit my own line of conduct; nor am I an enemy to their amusements; on the contrary: but their mornings might now be more usefully devoted in preparing for the great task which they will have to perform; for sure I am, they possess a spirit that will not permit them to skulk and hide their heads from the storm; they will scorn to be seen a miserable train of emigrants wandering and despised in a foreign land."

If in the same masterly speech there were some things and reflections which even candour cannot excuse, such in particular as the reviling taunts against the seceders from the Whig party, and a protest against the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, which measure, as we shall soon see, was imperatively called for by the internal circumstances of the country; yet, upon the whole, there was more to call for admiration than criticism or censure.

Mr. Pitt bestowed merited praise on the vigour, the manliness, and eloquence, displayed in this speech, with which he was so well satisfied, he said, that willingly he should forbear to notice

those parts that were objectionable. Adverting to an observation made by Mr. Sheridan, that much might be known to government, which could not possibly be known to him, the minister said, that it was strictly true, much was known to government which could not be known to him; but the country at large knew, that there existed a body of men, too considerable in number and activity, for government to pass over unnoticed, men who were going over for the daring purpose of correspondence with the French, for establishing a system of republicanism in this country, under the auspices of a foreign force. The existence of this conspiracy was confirmed by the conduct of our enemies, who, in all their proceedings, inspired their armies by assuring them of the entire co-operation of domestic traitors. Mr. Sheridan, however, when the bill for the suspension of the Habeas Act was brought in, expressed the utmost scepticism on the subject of conspiracies in the country, on the ground that no evidence of the fact appeared before the house, and that no credit was due to the assertions of the French. But he certainly would have acted more prudently in placing some reliance on the superior information of ministers than on the loyal sentiments of the political societies, in whose character and designs he affected to see nothing but the ardent love of freedom. It was ridiculous to demand the adduction of that evidence, the very exhibition of which

would necessarily have prevented the operation of justice. Yet, repeatedly did Mr. Sheridan oppose his incredulity and irony against the positive affirmation of government, and the general belief of the country. In consequence of the intelligence which had been received of the intention of many factious persons to enter into the volunteer associations for the express purpose of carrying on their traitorous objects, in the same manner as had already proved so fatal in the fleet, ministers thought it prudent to keep a watchful eye on the offers of service, and to admit no suspicious or doubtful characters. This raised great clamour, and Mr. Sheridan joined in the cry; though a very short time proved that he would have acted more discreetly in remaining silent, instead of saying, that the few disaffected in the country were like grasshoppers, making a noise, but too timid to be seen. In the same speech he took notice of the approaching trial at Maidstone, where some persons then lay in confinement on the charge of treason. Mr. Sheridan said, that he had no knowledge of any of these prisoners, except Mr. Arthur O'Connor; who he felt convinced was no traitor, and was incapable of acting with hostility against this country or its constitution.

Mr. Tierney expressed himself, on the same occasion, in still stronger language, and said, that from his close habits of intimacy with O'Connor, he was enabled peremptorily to affirm that their



political sentiments were perfectly the same. A fortnight after these gratuitous encomiums, the trial took place by special commission, when O'Connor, and four of his confederates, escaped conviction, through the mere formality of the law; and the man upon whom the document of treason was found received judgment, and was executed. Among the witnesses who came forward to give their testimony in behalf of Mr. O'Connor, for loyalty and integrity, was Mr. Sheridan, who repeated what he had before asserted in the House of Commons; and having stated his intimate knowledge of the prisoner about three years, observed, that he was particularly anxious for his society, on account of his character, and the recommendation he had received respecting him from Ireland. Mr. Sheridan added, that he never met with O'Connor in any company but the society of those gentlemen who formed the opposition, and in the private parties of his own house. On being asked whether he had ever conversed with him confidentially upon political subjects, he replied in these words:—"I think most confidentially, because I treated him, and I think he treated me with a confidence and unreservedness that might have been expected to arise from a much longer acquaintance." When interrogated whether Mr. O'Connor ever belonged to any political societies in this country, he answered in a more ample manner than the question called for, that his friend avoided all political so-

cieties; and that what particularly prepossessed him in his favour, was, that he never met any man so determined in reprobating the idea of any party or body of men in this country, under the pretence of grievances, encouraging the thought of French assistance. "In my life," repeated the witness, "I never met with a man more steady in that idea." Mr. Sheridan admitted, however, in answer to a question put to him by the counsel, that he understood, with regret, the fear O'Connor was in of being apprehended and sent over a prisoner to Ireland, which put him upon some schemes to get abroad; and that his friends very much lamented his being driven to any such necessity. Now it certainly was very extraordinary that Mr. Sheridan, and his political associates, should be without any suspicion of a man, who, by his own account, did not stand clear of criminal charges in Ireland, and to avoid the consequences of which he was extremely anxious to get over to the continent. This trial was attended with some remarkable and most disgraceful circumstances; for it being known that a warrant was issued to apprehend O'Connor, in the event of an acquittal, on the ground of other treasonable practices, a party of his friends resolved to assist him in effecting his escape. Accordingly, while the judge was pronouncing sentence of death upon O'Coigley, the Irish priest, who had been convicted, the principal, for such O'Connor unquestionably was, at-

tempted to get over the bar among the crowd, which being observed by the officers, they endeavoured to prevent him, and a scuffle ensued, occasioned by the persons who had concerted the rescue. After a scene of uproar unexampled in the history of judicial proceedings, O'Connor was taken, and, by virtue of the warrant from the secretary of state, sent over to Ireland, where he was convicted of high treason on the clearest evidence, though he afterwards saved his neck by an ample confession of his crimes, and among the rest that of which he had been acquitted in England.

The most active of the party concerned in aiding O'Connor to escape after his trial at Maidstone were the Earl of Thanet, Mr. Robert Fergusson the Barrister, and Mr. Dennis O'Brien, all persons intimately connected with the prisoner, and zealous members of the Whig Club. For this misdemeanour, they, with two others, were indicted at the instance of the crown, and tried before Lord Kenyon and all the judges of the Court of King's Bench, April the twenty-fifth, in the following year, when Lord Thanet and Mr. Fergusson being found guilty, were sentenced, the one to pay a fine of one thousand pounds, and to be imprisoned twelve months in the Tower; and the other five hundred pounds, and to be confined in the prison of the King's Bench for the same space of time.

As Mr. Sheridan had been a spectator of all that passed at Maidstone, his evidence was considered

of importance, and he gave it very explicitly, throwing the blame of the riot upon the officers, and endeavouring to clear the defendants of the charge on which they stood indicted. But when Mr. Law, now Lord Ellenborough, on the part of the crown, put the question home, whether from what he observed of the conduct of Lord Thanet and Mr. Fergusson he did not believe that they meant to favour the escape of O'Connor, he endeavoured to avoid giving a direct answer, which produced much altercation, and an appeal to Lord Chief Justice Kenyon, who said, that if he did not answer the question, the court must draw the natural inference. In the course of this examination, Mr. Sheridan then admitted that there had been a rumour of another warrant a little before the trial, and that it was discussed whether the writ could be issued before O'Connor should be dismissed from custody; but he persisted in maintaining that the defendants did not aid him in his endeavours to escape, though it was his belief that they wished it. The tumult which took place in a court of justice, upon a business of the greatest solemnity, Mr. Sheridan described as an idle panic; and when Mr. Erskine, in his address to the jury for the defendants, laid great stress upon this testimony, the attorney-general, now Lord Eldon, replied in these words: "The witness may have represented these transactions, as I have no doubt he did, as it seemed just to him to represent them.



Certainly I was not personally present ; but I was within hearing, and I can say that that gentleman is a man of stronger nerves than any other man in this country, if the representation he has given of this scene is a true one. By a true one, I do not mean that it is not one that the gentleman believes to be true ; but the evidence of Mr. Justice Heath gives it a character, which I believe every man in the County of Kent who was present would give it, namely, that it was a proceeding utterly inconsistent with the safe administration of justice ; that it was attended with a degree of indecency and tumult never witnessed before in a court of justice, and I trust never will be witnessed in a court of justice again."

At the time when this outrage took place at Maidstone, a sanguinary rebellion was raging in Ireland ; and the business on which O'Connor and his companions were engaged when they were apprehended was that of a mission to France, for the purpose of stimulating the republican government to undertake an invasion.

In order to quell the insurrection, several English regiments of militia at this period volunteered their services in Ireland, which offer being extremely seasonable, government lost no time in laying it before parliament, with an earnest recommendation that it should be accepted. The motion, however, was strenuously opposed in both houses, and with great vehemence by Mr. Sheridan, who

went pretty far in representing Ireland as acting on independent grounds, and as being justified in her resistance to English oppression, by the treatment which she had experienced, after being betrayed, duped, insulted, fooled, and disappointed in her dearest hopes; deprived of the government on which the people could confide, and thrown into the hands of rulers who were detested and despised. Notwithstanding this imprudent declamation, and the assertion that the offer of voluntary service on the part of the militia was merely the effect of ministerial influence, the measure proposed was carried, and the benefits of it were soon manifested in the check given to the insurgents, though aided by French forces with a large supply of arms and ammunition, the consequence of those negotiations in which O'Connor, by his own confession, had been principally engaged. Into the history of that rebellion it is unnecessary to enter; but the extensive preparations made for it, the atrocities with which it was marked, and the avowal that a separation from England, with the assistance of France, was the direct object which the leaders had in view, all conspire to show the weakness of those senators who could be so far imposed upon as to give their testimony to the loyalty of the most mischievous agent in this foul and sanguinary conspiracy.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

*Union with Ireland.—Mr. Sheridan's Opposition to that Measure.—Explanation of his Evidence on the Trial of Arthur O'Connor.—Complaints on the State of the Prison in Cold Bath Fields.—Reflection on the Plans of Mr. Howard.—Alteration of Kotzebue's Play of Pizarro.—Dedication to Mrs. Sheridan.—Remarkable Anecdotes connected with that Drama.*

THE rebellion in Ireland, and the open declaration of the disaffected in that country of their resolution to effect an entire separation from the British dominion, impelled all who deprecated so fatal an event to devise the best means for counteracting the baneful project. That Ireland had it in its power to maintain an absolute independence was out of the question ; for no reflecting mind could form such a conclusion a single moment, or even anticipate its probability, so long as any great states should remain on the continent of Europe. Considering, therefore, the avowed ambition of France, and the infatuation of the discontented in Ireland, who, out of hatred to the English government, and the desire of change, were ready to bind their country to the car of the new republic, it became an imperative duty to prevent such an act of patricide. The only effectual means of doing this, and of

saving both countries from the dreadful consequences which must have resulted from anarchy on the one hand, and French subjugation on the other, was that of bringing about such an union as the one which had cemented England and Scotland. It was natural to expect that a measure of this magnitude, sensibly touching national prejudices, and wounding national vanity, would not pass without fierce contention on each side of the Channel. Here it was a mere question of party ; but in Ireland it was one that roused all the passions into resentment and exertion.

But notwithstanding the difficulties to be encountered in carrying such a concern, there were many considerations which gave good assurance that it would meet with the approbation of the respectable majority in both countries. Recent events too plainly proved that the French rulers were actuated by a strong desire to bring Ireland under their yoke ; and there was evidence enough to shew that the turbulent and disaffected, who called themselves patriots, were very ready to put on the chains, without paying the least attention to the inevitable misery that must ensue. Having weighed these circumstances, and knowing also that the Irish parliament had no real independence, and of course could never accomplish any objects of general and substantial benefit, some of the ablest statesmen in both houses of that kingdom came to the resolution, in conjunction with the British mi-



nister, of proposing a union with England. Mr. Pitt accordingly brought down a message from His Majesty to that effect, on the twenty-second of January, 1799; and though the union was not explicitly recommended in it, enough appeared to indicate the real character of the measure; and as such it was considered by Mr. Sheridan, who came forward with great zeal and ability to enter his protest against an act which he contended went to deprive the people of Ireland of their rights, and was in direct violation of the agreement entered into between the parliaments of the two kingdoms in the year 1782. That adjustment, however, was nothing more than a recognition of the distinct privilege and jurisdiction of the Irish legislature, and therefore could have nothing to do with a resolution which both parliaments might, at a future period, think proper to make for their reciprocal benefit. Mr. Sheridan, on the contrary, maintained that this was a question which no legislative body in either kingdom could discuss, without the general consent, which certainly was as wild a notion as ever entered into the human imagination, and would, if admitted as a principle, at one stroke convert the revolution into an usurpation, and the union of England and Scotland into an act of arbitrary power on the one side, and of treacherous acquiescence on the other. It was, however, as competent for the legislature of Ireland to unite itself to that of the general body of the empire, as it had confessedly been with that

of Scotland about a century preceding. The right could not be contested on any reasonable ground, and the question of policy was of a different nature; but even this, when examined minutely, was certainly in favour of the proposition, because, in bringing Irish affairs immediately under the cognizance of the representatives of the whole united kingdom, there must be a much better chance of correcting evils, and applying remedies, than by leaving them to a parliament made entirely up of men governed by local interests. The loss of independence was merely ideal; and yet this constituted the principal topic of complaint in the speeches of Mr. Sheridan, who laboured in his opposition to the union with much brilliancy of declamation; and, what was better, with a more dignified temper than might have been expected from the nature of the subject. He asserted that the British government had two enemies in Ireland—"Poverty and Ignorance;"-and that, unless it could be shewn that the proposed measure would remove those evils, he should give it his unqualified opposition.

His observation was, no doubt, perfectly correct, as far as related to the prominent causes of the prevailing miseries in Ireland; but he seems to have forgotten one consideration, which completely removed the objections started by him to the intended junction; and this was the extraordinary fact, that while the Irish enjoyed a separate and independent legislature, the very evils, now so emphatically dwelt

upon, had never been in the least ameliorated. If, therefore, the parliament of Ireland had for such a long period, and with the advantage of local information and combined influence, done nothing to improve the condition of the lower orders of the people, it was high time that a change should take place, which might give some chance of amendment. But the character of the parliament of Ireland, and its total inefficiency to accomplish any beneficial objects, while it was perpetually under the management of particular families, was never more remarkably exhibited than in the extraordinary conduct pursued at the time of the regency, when the legislature of that kingdom presumed to assert virtually an independency in the choice of the sovereign. This was a case in point, and one that completely proved the necessity of uniting the representation of that country to the rest of the empire for the general good, and as the most likely means of keeping down the corruption of faction, and restraining even the undue influence of the crown. Mr. Sheridan endeavoured to evade the reason for the union, drawn from the affair of the regency, by saying that there was no difference between the two parliaments, in regard to the person who was to exercise the sovereignty; but, as was well observed in answer, the agreement on that point was purely accidental and immaterial, while the principle remained, which left an opening at a future time for the legislature of each country to

choose its own regent in a case of emergency. Mr. Sheridan considered even the union with Scotland as a bad precedent, which ought not to be followed; though, at the same time, he was obliged to admit that the measure there had been productive of the happiest effects, which he attributed to the industry and sobriety of the people, who knew how to make the best use of the advantages which they had acquired. Mr. Sheridan moved several resolutions, for the purpose of impeding the great object of the union, and of introducing covertly the question of Catholic emancipation; but all his efforts were fruitless; and this magnificent plan for the consolidation of the empire, which had been rather the wish than the expectation of the greatest statesmen, was carried triumphantly both in the parliament of Ireland and that of England.

In the course of the debates on this question, some allusion having been made to the trial at Maidstone, and the testimonies there given to the character of Arthur O'Connor, induced Mr. Sheridan to enter upon some explanation of his evidence on that occasion. After observing that he should not retract what he had advanced on that day, he said that O'Connor never made him his confidant; and consequently, that knowing his sentiments, it was hardly likely he should communicate to him any thing on foreign interference in the concerns of Ireland. All this was admissible as far as it went; but it could be no



palliation of that very strong testimonial which Mr. Sheridan voluntarily gave both in the House of Commons and at the trial, in favour of the sentiments of that man, who now, by his own account, had treated him with duplicity. The warmth of Mr. Sheridan's friendship, and his readiness to save an old acquaintance from conviction, may have been highly praiseworthy; but he could not be justified in saying upon the trial that he conversed with him most confidentially, and was treated by him with the most perfect unreservedness, when it appeared afterwards, by his own declaration, that he was never the confidant of Arthur O'Connor. All that can be said for this ebullition of zeal is, that it proceeded from generosity of temper, and that interest, which a liberal minded man naturally feels in the concerns of a person with whose acquaintance he has been pleased, and of whose honour he has no doubt.

About this time Mr. Sheridan's humanity was excited in behalf of another gentleman, whose case attracted much attention, and who afterwards suffered death for high treason. This was Colonel Despard, then a prisoner in Cold Bath Fields Prison, under the operation of the act for suspending the habeas corpus, and of whose dangerous character and practices government had sufficient information to warrant his detention. The discussion of his petitions to the House of Commons led to a considerable controversy about the nature

of the prison, and the manner in which the persons confined in it were treated. The subject was well adapted to work upon the passions; and for that purpose nothing was left undone that could serve to inflame the public mind, and to turn the general indignation of the populace against the government, for erecting on the edge of the metropolis a dismal building, most invidiously denominated the English Bastille. This prison having been constructed on the plan recommended by Howard, the philanthropist, his name came up, as a matter of course, during the agitation of the alleged grievances in this place of solitary confinement. Mr. Sheridan went so far as to say that he believed it would have been better for society if no such plan as that of Mr. Howard's had ever been heard of, though he was persuaded the uses to which it had been applied never entered into the imagination of the worthy projector.

From a subject which tended to excite popular clamour against government and magistrates, it is pleasant to be relieved by one of a different description, and calculated, through the medium of public amusement, to inspire the people with virtuous sentiments. This season Mr. Sheridan brought out the drama of Pizarro, altered considerably from a play written by Kotzebue, with a different title. Few pieces in modern theatrical history have experienced such a degree of popularity as this; and its success in the publication was commensurate with the run which it had on the

stage, there having been printed within a short time no less than twenty-nine editions, of one thousand copies each, besides several translations of the same play by other hands. To this very popular performance was prefixed the following terse and elegant inscription:—

“TO HER whose approbation of this drama, and whose peculiar delight in the applause it has received from the public, have been to ME the highest gratification its success has produced, I dedicate this play.

“RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.”

One of the principal additions made to this drama, and certainly that which contributed very materially to establish its reputation, is the scene where Rolla, in addressing his countrymen on the prospect of an invasion, describes the atrocities of the enemy, the virtues of their own beloved monarch, and exhorts all to unite for the common defence. It should be observed, however, that this animated harangue, which was so highly seasonable and impressive in its effect on the stage, had been delivered long before by Mr. Sheridan himself in Westminster Hall, on the trial of Mr. Hastings, of which any one may be satisfied who will take the trouble to compare the play with the celebrated speech which he delivered on that occasion.

Upon the merits of Pizarro, whether in its ori-

ginal or altered state, it would be needless to expatiate. As a spectacle, it undoubtedly possessed powerful attractions, which rendered it a favourite with the public, and proved highly lucrative to the treasury of the theatre. The following narrative of facts connected with this play, and that of the *STRANGER*, which preceded it at Drury Lane, is sufficiently curious in itself, and characteristic of Mr. Sheridan, to deserve a place in these memoirs.

The introduction of the German drama, from many circumstances with which it was attended, may almost be said to form an epoch in the history of the English stage. The success of the *Stranger*, the first that was brought forwards, is well known ; but it is not so well known, though the fact is certain, that a considerable time before its appearance, I believe two years, the translation was offered to Mr. Sheridan. He took it, and opened the manuscript casually, when the first incident that engaged his attention was Count Wintersen's falling into the water, and being rescued by the *Stranger*; for, in the original, it is the count himself, not the child to whom this accident happens. The incident did not please the critic, and without looking farther he threw the manuscript aside, saying it would never do. A friend of Mr. Thompson, the translator, afterwards engaged Mr. Sheridan to give it more attention, suggesting that the great objection might be obviated by transferring the incident from the father to the child. The hint was adopted ;



and Mr. Sheridan, after making some other alterations, brought the play before the public. Its success created a rage for the German drama, which must be alive in the memories of all persons who were then frequenters of the theatre.

Some particulars relative to the bringing out *Pizarro* may not here be irrelevant, the rather, since many contradictory reports were circulated at the time respecting what passed upon the subject between Mr. Sheridan, and a lady of some note in the literary world, Mrs. Anne Plumptre. On the one hand Mr. Sheridan was accused of *swindling* this lady out of her translation of the play; while, on the other hand, she has been charged with wanting to arrogate to herself a larger share than was her due of the reputation the piece acquired, or, as it has been expressed, *wanting to deprive Mr. Sheridan of the credit of HIS Pizarro*.

The case was simply this.—Very early in the dramatic season of 1798 and 99, the season following that in which the *Stranger* was produced, a translation of Kotzebue's *Spaniards in Peru* was offered to Mr. Sheridan by a friend. Though executed by a German, and the English consequently very bad, not always intelligible, Mr. Sheridan saw that much might be made of the piece, and accepted it, agreeing to give the translator one hundred pounds, for which he was to have the sole and absolute command over the manuscript, to alter it at his pleasure. A notice was immediately given in

the play-bills, that a grand drama from the German of Kotzebue was in preparation, and would be brought out as early in the season as possible.

The utmost anxiety was instantly awakened in the public, to learn which of the numerous pieces of this author's, already published, it might be; and the secret being discovered by a gentleman, a German scholar, who was in the habit of frequenting the Green Room, he set about translating the play, informing Mr. Sheridan what he was doing, and adding that unless he gave him one hundred pounds for his translation, it should be published without delay. This was about Christmas; and Mr. Sheridan, conscious that his own play was in no forwardness, was obliged to submit to this unhandsome treatment, and paid the money, on condition that he was to have the translation, hoping that it would facilitate him in his task. Two or three acts were accordingly consigned to him, but the remainder he could never obtain.

In the mean time Mrs. Plumptre had been engaged by a bookseller to translate a series of Kotzebue's plays, to be published periodically; the selection of the pieces being left to her entirely. *The Virgin of the Sun*, and *The Spaniards in Peru*, two pieces on the same subject, happened to be among the very early ones selected by her. When they were translated, the manuscripts were shown to a gentleman, a friend of her's, who had also some slight acquaintance with Mr. Sheridan. The gen-

tleman was much struck with the pieces, and observed it was a pity that they should be published as translations only, for he thought they might be brought with great effect upon the stage, and proposed mentioning them to Mr. Sheridan, to which the translator readily agreed. Mr. Sheridan, on hearing *The Spaniards in Peru* named, exclaimed, that it was the piece he was going to bring forwards, and said he hoped Mrs. Plumptre's translation would not be published before his play was acted. The gentleman replied, that unless accepted for the theatre, he believed it was the intention to publish the translations without delay. Mr. Sheridan then asked whether it might not be possible to engage Mrs. Plumptre to withhold them till after the performance of the play; to which the gentleman replied, that he thought it might be very possible. "Well," said Mr. Sheridan, "mention it to Mrs. Plumptre, and say that I will call upon her very shortly and talk with her about it." The message was delivered, and Mrs. Plumptre in consequence wrote a note to Mr. Sheridan, stating the time when, according to the arrangement with the bookseller, the piece would be published, which would be about six weeks, adding, that if Mr. Sheridan wished for a longer delay, she would be ready to comply with his wishes, but could not do it without the bookseller's consent.

A month elapsing without Mrs. Plumptre's hear-

ing any thing more, she naturally concluded that Mr. Sheridan was grown indifferent upon the subject, and the translation was printed, when, two days before it was to be published, he made his proposed visit. He was full of apologies for not having sooner paid attention to her note, but said the truth was, that he had only read it the day before. "*All the notes and letters I receive,*" he said, "*are thrown into a bag, and I read them when I am at leisure. It so happened that a longer period than usual elapsed without my looking them over; but yesterday, when I went into the country, I took the bag with me, read the letters in the carriage, and there I found your note.*" He then proceeded to hope that he was not too late to stop the publication, which would be an essential injury to the success of the piece when brought out; and after a long conversation, engaged Mrs. Plumptre to go to the bookseller, and endeavour to prevail with him to retard the publication. Mr. Sheridan then added, that, if it was not an unreasonable request, he wished Mrs. Plumptre would oblige him with one of the printed copies of her translation, as he was much perplexed with those he had; and for the German language, he said he did not himself understand a word of it. "*Indeed,*" he said, "*I know nothing of modern languages: I can with difficulty puzzle out a sentence of French by the help of a grammar and dictionary.*" At the same time he hinted that



he should certainly not think of asking for the use of the translation without a proper acknowledgment being made for it.

The bookseller's consent to the delay requested was not obtained without difficulty, and after two or three conferences between him and Mr. Sheridan. It was generally believed, however, that even the eloquence of this celebrated orator's tongue would have failed of success, but for the more powerful eloquence of fifty pounds added to it. Such eloquence was irresistible, and the translation was not published till the day after the play was acted. A copy of the translation was consigned to Mr. Sheridan, and from that his play was principally written. Whole speeches, nay, scenes are almost copied from it, verbatim. The only acknowledgment, however, that the translator ever received was the freedom of the theatre for herself and a friend, but which has been discontinued since the rebuilding of the theatre.

## CHAPTER XXX.

*Dispute relative to the Termination of the Century.—Letter from Mr. Fox to Mr. Richardson on that Subject.—Meeting of Parliament.—Motion for an Enquiry into the Failure of the Expedition to Holland.—Sound Advice of Mr. Sheridan on manning the Navy.—His Praise of the Duke of York.—His erroneous Opinion on the Character of Buonaparte.—Renewal of the Suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act.—Two Attempts made in one Day to assassinate the King.—Conduct of Mr. Sheridan on the latter Occasion.*

AT the latter end of the year 1799, it became a very general subject of argument whether the eighteenth century expired with the commencement of the year 1800 or with its close. Mr. Sheridan held the opinion that the century was terminated when the year 1800 began: his friend Mr. Richardson held that it did not expire till the night of the thirty-first of December, when the clock had stricken twelve, and when the first of January, 1801, would begin. After canvassing the matter for some time, it ended in a wager, which was referred to their mutual friend Mr. Fox, who, in his usual playful way, gave his decision in favour of Mr. Richardson, though he was himself doubtful on this chronological question, till on being constituted a judge between his friends,

he was under the necessity of investigating the point more narrowly.

The question submitted for his determination was couched in these laconic terms :

“ A. B. affirms that the eighteenth century does not expire till twelve o’clock at night on the thirty-first of December in the year 1800.

“ Mr. Richardson contends for the above opinion, which he backs with a bet of five guineas.

“ Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Westley bet Mr. Richardson that he is wrong.

R. B. SHERIDAN.

T. WESTLEY.

J. RICHARDSON.

“ It is agreed that Mr. Fox is to decide this bet.”

“ I think Mr. Richardson right.

C. J. Fox.”

This decision was conveyed in the following letter.

Dear Sir,

I received your letter with its enclosure on my return to this place on Saturday, and have deferred answering it till to-day, only that I might not appear to give a hasty opinion. Indeed, I had so strong a prepossession that you were in the wrong, from the arrogant manner in which you state the case, that I wanted some time to enable me to believe it possible that you could be in the right ;

but after searching for all possible grounds, or even pretences for deciding against you, I own I can find none.

Your's ever,

C. J. Fox.

St. Ann's Hill,  
Monday.

In the session of parliament which commenced on the twenty-first of January, 1800, Mr. Sheridan distinguished himself chiefly by moving an enquiry into the causes of the failure of the expedition against Holland, during the preceding autumn. On this subject he dwelt with considerable force, and endeavoured to shew that ministers were not justified in relying upon the favourable disposition of the Dutch when they sent out an armament to release that country from the yoke of France. He also reprobated the manner in which the Texel fleet had been obtained, through the treachery, as he called it, of the seamen, adducing in support of what he advanced the authority of our Blake, who told his sailors, that it was their duty to fight for their country, in whatever hands the government might be; but Mr. Sheridan, in relating this anecdote, and drawing an argument from it, omitted one consideration, which made an essential difference in the circumstances, namely, that England retained its independency when the monarchy was overthrown, whereas Holland at this time was



in a state of wretched vassalage under the iron rule of France. One excellent remark, however, occurred in this speech, which did great credit to the patriotic sentiments of the orator, who, after censuring the practice of sending united Irishmen on board the fleet, observed that culprits and vagabonds of every description, worthless wretches of all sorts, were thought good enough for His Majesty's service; and people spoke of putting them on board ship as the fittest place in the world for their reception. It was impossible, he said, to conceive a more gross and palpable folly, or a more shameful and dangerous abuse. "For God's sake," he exclaimed, "dispose of such people any where but in your navy; place them in your public offices; send them to the Treasury, the Excise, the Customs; provide for them in the War Office; feed them with cheese parings and candle ends; but do not convert your navy into a receptacle for rogues and traitors. Do not dispose of them in a way that makes them more dangerous than they could be any where else. What would you think, if your ships were to be built in the same way that they are manned? What would you think, if when a rotten beam were found in any public office, it should be said, O! this wont do for His Majesty's use; send it to the dock-yard? And yet the absurdity would be no greater than that which is practised every day in the manner I have stated. As you build your ships of the soundest wood,

you should take no less care to man them with the soundest hearts."

Nothing could be more just than this advice, which ought ever to be thoroughly weighed and acted upon in a country that depends so much upon the moral character of its people, and the sound principles of that valuable body of men who are entrusted with the charge of defending its shores and commerce. With regard to the recent enterprize, undertaken for the deliverance of Holland from the bondage in which it was held by the power of French arms, Mr. Sheridan seemed to think that the Dutch had no wish for emancipation. In this opinion, if he really entertained it, he was clearly mistaken, while in censuring the manner in which the expedition terminated, and the causes of the disgrace, he was beyond all question perfectly correct, particularly in his observation that the military efforts were made dependent on the political views of those who planned the enterprize. On this occasion Mr. Sheridan embraced the opportunity of vindicating the Duke of York from all share of the blame, and lamenting that he was not a member of the cabinet. In saying that the Duke of York was a proper person to advise His Majesty upon every thing which such an expedition might require, Mr. Sheridan remarked, that he only repeated what the public voice had already declared of his honourable, attentive, and meritorious government of

the army, since his appointment to the chief command.

At the conclusion of this able and liberal speech, he renewed what he had so often stated on the object of the war, affirming that it was for no other purpose than the restoration of the Bourbons to the throne which they had lost. The motion for an enquiry was rejected; and Mr. Sheridan lived long enough to see fulfilled, what he predicted would never happen, both the re-establishment of the House of Orange, and that of the ancient monarchy of France. On a motion made by Mr. Pitt for a grant to the Emperor of Germany, and some other powers, to ensure their co-operation with this country, Mr. Sheridan took a luminous review of the history of the war, and stood on strong ground when he exposed the fallacy of trusting to continental alliances. It was, however, not a little remarkable, that in manifesting his determined hostility to the House of Bourbon, he should have offered an apology for Buonaparte as the observer of treaties, and asserted that it was both his interest and inclination to live on terms of amity with this country. "I maintain," said Mr. Sheridan, "that Buonaparte himself is a friend to peace. There is in his correspondence with the English ministers a total renunciation of jacobinical principles." Again, shortly afterwards, he observed, "I am desirous of peace at this time,

because I think Buonaparte would be as good a friend and neighbour to this country as ever were any of the Bourbons.' At the close of the session he entered more fully into the same subject, in reference to the overtures for peace which Buonaparte, as First Consul of France, had directly made to the King of England. A correspondence ensued between Lord Grenville and Talleyrand, but it was evident to every dispassionate mind, that the whole application on the part of the usurper was a mere farce to delude the French people, and to facilitate the attainment of the great objects of military ambition, which were considered as essential to the security of that sovereignty, which was now established on the ruins of the republic. Mr. Sheridan thought otherwise; but he exhibited a very short-sighted judgment in saying that Buonaparte had shewn to his own country that his object was to maintain the power he had acquired by the moderation of his government; and it was therefore reasonable to hope, that when he had achieved the liberty of France, he would, when his enemies should afford him the opportunity, impart to it all the blessings and happiness of civilized peace.

A short time served to destroy all this confident expectation, and to develop the real character of the despot, if, indeed, his conduct in Egypt and in Europe, after his return, had not



been of itself already sufficient to put every nation upon its guard against the hollowness of his professions.

In an early part of this session, the bill for the suspension of the habeas corpus act was renewed, though vigorously opposed by Mr. Sheridan, with the old arguments on the insignificance of the numbers and means of the disaffected; and the grievance under which it placed those who came within the reach of ministerial vengeance, of which he gave the following instance: "A man of the name of Patterson, who had a shop at Manchester, kept a tilted cart, over which he inscribed the names of Pitt and Patterson. This man, who was known to have no partner in his trade, was asked what he meant by the name of Pitt on his cart, as he had no share in his business? 'Ah,' replied he, 'if he has no share in the business, he has a large share in the profits.'" On this he was taken up and committed to Cold Bath Fields Prison, but soon after liberated, with a strict order not to go within thirty miles of Manchester, which, however ridiculous it might appear, proved serious to the man, and was the ruin of his business.

On the evening of the fifteenth of May, this year, a most extraordinary circumstance took place at Drury Lane Theatre, which was rendered still more remarkable by an occurrence that happened the same morning in the Park, where, as

His Majesty was inspecting the field exercises of the grenadier battalion of the guards, a shot was fired from one of the muskets in the direction of the king; but instead of accomplishing the object intended, the ball entered the thigh of a young gentleman, and passed quite through to the other. The wounds were dressed on the spot, and a strict examination of the pieces and cartridge-boxes of the soldiers was made; but the perpetrator of this atrocious deed could not be found. In the evening their Majesties went to the theatre, which was, as usual on such occasions, very much crowded. The king first entered his box, when immediately a man rose up in the front seat of the pit and fired a pistol at him; but providentially the ball lodged in the roof of the box, which direction it took through the sudden promptitude of a person who sat near the man, and in observing the action, threw up his arm to prevent the murderous intention. A great confusion necessarily ensued, and the assassin being seized, was conveyed to a private room of the theatre, where Mr. Sheridan, assisted by a magistrate, proceeded to examine him, but found neither fire arms nor papers on his person. On being questioned by Mr. Sheridan, he said that his name was James Hatfield: he had served his time to a working silversmith, but had enlisted into the fifteenth light dragoons, with whom he had fought for his king and country. On seeing the Duke of York

come into the room, he exclaimed: "I know your royal highness. God bless you. You are a good fellow. I have served with your highness;" and, pointing to some scars, "I got these, and more than these, in fighting by your side. At Lincelles I was left three hours among the dead in a ditch, and was taken prisoner by the French. I had my arm broken by a shot, and eight wounds in my head; but I recovered, and here I am." When the investigation was over, throughout which insanity was evident, the man was committed to Cold Bath Fields Prison, being conducted by Mr. Sheridan, who took a very active part in the whole of the enquiry; and in his anxiety to discover whether any thing like a conspiracy existed, evinced the greatest affection for their Majesties and the whole royal family.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

*Early Meeting of Parliament.—Distressed State of the Country.—Mr. Sheridan's Plan to prevent Scarcity.—Elegant Compliment paid to him by Mr. Pitt.—Motion for a separate Peace.—Eulogy on Mr. Fox.—First Imperial Parliament.—Election of Horne Tooke for Old Sarum.—Motion for his Ejectment.—Mr. Sheridan's Description of the Addington Administration.—His liberal Conduct on the Non-Residence Act.—Whimsical Occurrence.—His Character of the Piece.—Theatrical Concerns.—Injury sustained by Mr. Richardson in his Purchase.—Proceedings in Chancery.—Mr. Sheridan pleads his own Cause.—Singular Instance of his Carelessness and Indolence.*

PARLIAMENT resumed its sittings early in November, this year, for the purpose chiefly of providing some measures to alleviate the general distress occasioned by the visitation of Providence, in the failure of the late harvest. On this occasion the minister very judiciously expressed his hope that no party-feeling or political prejudices would be mixed with a discussion which required unanimity in council and liberality of sentiment. Mr. Sheridan certainly regulated his conduct by this rule, and avoided through the debates which occurred both levity and acrimony. He was of opinion, indeed, that there was some



defect in the existing corn laws, which he thought might be properly amended, by permitting importation of foreign grain at all times, upon condition of its being warehoused and bonded, until the price of our own wheat in the market should be eighty-four shillings the quarter: a measure, no doubt, adapted to encourage speculation, and productive of benefit in particular exigencies, but liable to many objections, from the nature of the commodity, and its influence upon domestic agriculture.

Amidst the feuds of party, and the violence of political hostility, it is pleasing to witness occasional instances of urbanity and generous concession in men who have been accustomed to treat each other with personal enmity. A case of this kind occurred early in the present session, when on a motion for papers respecting the state of Austria, Mr. Sheridan launched some sarcastic observations against ministers, and observed, that the frequency of such applications on his side of the house indicated as much perseverance and magnanimity in making resolutions, as the minister had evinced in carrying on the war, and with about the same degree of success. To this keen remark Mr. Pitt replied by a very handsome compliment, acknowledging that Mr. Sheridan had more than once, in seasons of great national difficulty, manifested a noble disposition in coming forward to support those measures of govern-

ment which had for their object the deliverance of the country from impending evil, and the security of the general safety.

On the first of December Mr. Sheridan moved, ineffectually, for an address to His Majesty, praying him to take an early opportunity of effecting a separate peace. The speech with which he prefaced this motion displayed the characteristic brilliancy and energy of the author; but it had little novelty, either in particular illustration, or the general argument. At the close, Mr. Sheridan introduced a neat eulogy upon his absent friend, the leader of the opposition, in these words: "I do not say that there is but one man in the kingdom capable of making a solid peace. God forbid! I believe that there are many; but I do not scruple to say that a peace can be concluded only upon the principles of that one man. Who that man is it is needless for me to mention, and his principles are equally well known."

The new century commenced with the legislative union of Great Britain and Ireland, soon after which a change of ministers being in contemplation, on the resignation of Mr. Pitt, the Speaker of the House of Commons, Mr. Addington, was called to the situation which had been so long held by his illustrious friend. On this occasion, Sir John Mitford, now Lord Redesdale, was elected to the vacant chair, after a slight opposition on the part of Mr. Sheridan, who pro-

posed his friend Mr. Charles Dundas, on what ground it was difficult to conjecture, especially as that gentleman very prudently declined the honour.

The first Imperial Parliament was rendered somewhat remarkable by the appearance of the celebrated John Horne Tooke, as the virtuous representative of the ancient Borough of Old Sarum, on the nomination of that eccentric nobleman, Lord Camelford. Such a phænomenon in the House of Commons excited great attention, and no little disgust; especially among some of the hereditary branches of the nobility, who knew his powers, and hated his principles. Lord Temple, now Marquis of Buckingham, whose family were offended at the conduct of their relative in giving his patronage to this sturdy republican, set himself with great zeal to the task of casting Tooke from his seat as an apostate priest. The latter thinking, probably, that he had as much right to sit in the House of Commons as the no less worthy Bishop of Autun had to shake off the episcopal character in France, made a vigorous resistance, in which he was supported by Fox, Erskine, and Sheridan, who defended his eligibility with more zeal than friendship. They were far enough from entertaining any real regard for Tooke; but it was a matter for opposition to work upon; and on that account alone they espoused his cause, though every body must have

been convinced that had the friends of ministers brought in a clergyman as a member of parliament, the same party who now maintained the right of the old parson of Brentford would have been the most forward in adducing precedents for his ejection.

At this period Mr. Sheridan gave full scope to his wit, at the expense of the new administration, which he compared to a ship without masts, incapable of sailing on a direct course, or of defending itself from the enemy, by having thrown the great guns overboard. This was rather a compliment to Pitt and Dundas, and yet the orator continued to attack the former with as much asperity after his resignation, as he had been accustomed to do when that great man was at the head of the Treasury.

During this session, little occurred of any moment to call for the display of eloquence or the exertion of industry; but in some cases, Mr. Sheridan evinced both his watchfulness in the progress of business, and an independency of thinking for himself on matters not connected with the party to which he belonged. Thus, in the debate on the bill for enforcing the residence of the clergy, he advocated their right to employ themselves in agricultural pursuits, from which some narrow-minded members were earnestly bent upon restraining them. Mr. Sheridan successfully ridiculed this puritanical principle; and he contended



with great warmth and force of reasoning, that the parochial clergy would by such useful occupations not only improve their own circumstances, but prove beneficial in the way of example and superior knowledge to their neighbours. In the course of this discussion, a whimsical incident happened, which gave rise to much laughter in the house, and many squibs out of it. During the debate, Mr. Sheridan having proposed an amendment, which partly met with the concurrence of Mr. Addington, went over to the treasury-bench to converse with him on the subject, and while there, he had occasion to rise, in the way of explanation, to answer something that fell from Mr. Perceval. The singularity of his situation excited considerable mirth at the time, and produced some humourous remarks, especially as the amendment was carried, which did not often happen to be the case with his propositions.

At length, that peace which had been so often urged as indispensably necessary to preserve the political existence of Britain was concluded, and great were the rejoicings which the notification of the event produced in the metropolis. Parliament in consequence met at an earlier period than usual, and Mr. Sheridan immediately after its opening took the opportunity of observing that this was a peace of which every man was glad, but of which no man could be proud. It was, in short, a peace that involved to a certain extent the degradation

of the national dignity, and which no truly English heart could feel with indifference. It was, however, such a peace, he added, as the war naturally had a tendency to; for it was one of the worst wars in which this nation had ever been engaged; and therefore the peace was, perhaps, on the whole, as good as any person could have made under the circumstances in which the country was placed.

Though, as far as related to the treaty itself, there was too much truth in this representation, it escaped the orator that his party had contributed very materially to that very degradation of which such loud complaint was now made, by their unremitted efforts to embarrass the operations of their own government, and thereby facilitating those of the enemy.

Having arrived at this period in the political history of Mr. Sheridan, it may be proper now to take some notice of his theatrical affairs, which certainly were neither better managed, nor in a more prosperous condition than those of the state.

At the beginning of the present year he entered into an engagement with Mr. Richardson for the sale to him of one-fourth part of the Drury Lane concern, at the price of twenty-five thousand pounds. On this occasion the Dukes of Northumberland and Bedford, with the Earls of Thanet and Fitzwilliam, and some other distinguished friends of Richardson, generously raised

among them about fourteen thousand pounds to enable him to complete his purchase. It is evident, however, on the slightest reflection, that this was such an extravagant bargain as to excite astonishment, how any man of common perspicacity could have suffered himself to be so grossly deceived. But Sheridan had the art of magnifying every thing in which he possessed any interest; and in the present instance he contrived, very successfully, to make his friend believe that the theatre only wanted a little of his ingenuity and application to render it a most lucrative speculation. The agreement was accordingly ratified, and the money paid; but, to the honour of the above noblemen and Sir Thomas Baring, it should be observed, that when they discovered what an error had been committed, and how deeply poor Richardson had suffered from what was done for his benefit, they voluntarily relinquished their claims in favour of his widow and children. Unfortunately the heavy incumbrances on the establishment, and the vast expense attending the building a new theatre, have frustrated the benevolent intentions of those benefactors, and prevented the advantage that would possibly have otherwise resulted from this act of liberality.

Mr. Richardson had scarcely completed his ruinous bargain before he found himself entangled in a chancery suit, not as a principal, but involved in the concerns of his friend. It appeared that



Messrs. Ford and Hammersley were trustees for the renters, and that by an order of the court they were entitled to receive the produce of the performances for the liquidation of their own private debt, the discharge of the necessary expenses, and to satisfy the legal demands of the subscribers. When the individual claims of these gentlemen were paid off, an objection arose against their continuing to receive the money on each night of performance; in reply to which, the trustees sheltered themselves under the order of the court, and pleaded for the holders of shares in whose name and for whose benefit they acted. They accordingly applied for a confirmation of the appointment, which Sheridan resisted in person, though he had to contend with the whole strength of the bar. In the course of the pleadings, the chancellor having asked who were the proprietors at the beginning of the year, was told Messrs. Sheridan, Richardson, and Grubb, but this was denied on the ground that Mr. Sheridan had not in his answer mentioned any other person as proprietor except himself. The chancellor in his remarks on the case observed, that Mr. Sheridan had certainly given his consent to the order which should make provision for the payment of the renters' shares, reserving the surplus for himself; and when his lordship concluded, Mr. Sheridan addressed the court at considerable length, to explain his ideas of the trust-deed, the terms of which, he said, clearly implied that the



performers were to be first paid ; and he added, that he would neither sign any engagement, nor consent to any order, without that condition should be explicitly stated and peremptorily determined. He then stated, that the trustees had agreed with the architect to finish a theatre for seventy-five thousand pounds, which sum had already been expended ; and yet the building was still so incomplete as to require ten thousand pounds more. Whether he was bound to pay that money he considered as a very doubtful question, particularly as he had never given any orders with regard to the work. He lastly asserted, that the deed which called Mr. Richardson and Mr. Grubb joint proprietors of the theatre had advanced an utter falsehood, as the rights of those two gentlemen were wholly derivable from himself. After a very long speech, in which he contended for his own undiminished claims on the ground of equity, and asserted that he had been entrapped by Messrs. Ford and Hammersley, who had no right whatever in the property, the business was adjourned till the next day, when a new plea was set up by the bankers, who stated, that, from the uncertainty of the receipts of the theatre it was necessary to keep the order in force from which Sheridan prayed to be released. On this occasion the counsel said that above eight thousand pounds were then due to the Duke of Bedford, for which a distress was actually in the house, the furniture of which would

be sold within a week, if the business was not settled. On the part of Mr. Grubb, a peculiar case of hardship was detailed by his advocate, who affirmed, that, after paying Mr. Sheridan fifteen thousand pounds for a share, he was obliged to keep out of the way to avoid being arrested, on account of the debts of the establishment in which he was unluckily inveigled.

In a subsequent stage of the pleadings, Mr. Sheridan requested that an additional trustee might be appointed to act as a check upon the treasurer's department, though, from what appeared in the litigation, it would have been more consistent, probably, had an investigation been instituted into every engagement and expenditure previously incurred on account of the theatre.

At length Mr. Agar, who was of counsel for Mr. Grubb, let in some light upon the mystery, by saying, that besides what had been paid and contracted for by that gentleman, Mr. Sheridan had actually obtained the enormous sum of three hundred and fifty thousand pounds, of which two hundred and seventy thousand remained totally unaccounted for. Such was the condition of this boasted establishment when the proprietor vaunted of its flourishing circumstances, and prevailed upon Mr. Kemble to negotiate for an extensive share in the concern, on the promise of its being placed under his sole direction. Mr. Holland, the architect, also came forward in the latter part of the

hearings, to exhibit his complaints against Sheridan, who positively assured him at the commencement of the plan for a new theatre that eighty thousand pounds were in actual readiness to cover the expenses of the work, besides fifteen private boxes undisposed of, which would be sufficient to answer contingencies.

Mr. Holland added, that Mr. Sheridan, so far from taking no part in the execution of the plan, was extremely solicitous to have it completed, and that as expeditiously as possible, without any regard to the expense, since, as he observed, any addition for that purpose would be repaid by the receipts of the season, which actually proved to be the case.

Mr. Sheridan made an elaborate reply to these allegations; but it was very desultory, and consisted more of declamation upon the weight of character than an explanation of facts. In this speech, however, he acknowledged his having committed an act of carelessness, which could hardly have been credited, had it come from any other authority than himself. Wishing, as he said, to give some security to, and to have some security from, the Duke of Bedford, he applied to his grace to consolidate the whole rent at ten pounds per night, observing, that he did not ask it as a favour, but that, if he was inclined to lay himself under an obligation to any man, it would certainly be to the noble duke. His grace desired him to put his

proposal in writing, which he did, and it was agreed to on the part of the duke; yet, above twelve months after, Sheridan feeling surprised at not having received any written acknowledgment of the proceeding, applied to the Duke of Bedford's solicitor upon the subject, who assured him that an answer had been sent a year before; upon which information he turned to his table, where lay the identical letter unopened.

After several adjournments had taken place on this legal contest, which the chancellor repeatedly but ineffectually recommended to arbitration, Mr. Sheridan withdrew his claims to the receipts of the treasury, in favour of the renters, until the whole debt should be liquidated.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

*Eulogium upon Mr. Pitt.—New Parliament.—Re-election of Mr. Sheridan for Stafford.—Visit of Mr. Fox to Paris.—His Interview with the First Consul, who bestows upon him the most fulsome Flattery.—Superior Discernment of Mr. Sheridan.—His Development of the Character of Buonaparte.—His Vindication of the Volunteers, and Vote of Thanks to them.—Offer of the Prince of Wales to serve, in Case of Invasion.—Observations of Mr. Sheridan on that Subject.—Parliamentary Discussion of the Embarrassments of His Royal Highness.*

IN the discussion of the merits of the peace, upon which subject there existed a great difference of opinion, Mr. Sheridan paid a very handsome compliment, mixed with a strong censure, to Mr. Pitt. Having alluded to the circumstance, that many of the old administration were employed under Mr. Addington, the witty orator observed : “ I remember a fable of Aristophanes, which is translated from the Greek into decent English. I mention this for the country gentlemen. It is of a man who sat so long on a seat, about as long, perhaps, as the ex-minister did on the treasury bench, that he actually grew to it ; and when Hercules pulled him off, he left all the sitting part of the man behind

him. The house could make the application," remarked Mr. Sheridan; who then proceeded in a manner which attracted great attention, and some surprise, on all sides: "Of that ex-minister I would just say, that no man admires his splendid talents more than I do. If ever there was a man formed and fitted by nature to benefit his country, and to give it lustre, he is such a man. He has no low, little, mean, petty vices. He has too much good sense, taste, and talent, to set his mind upon ribands, stars, titles, or other appendages, and idols of rank. He is of a nature not at all suited to be the creature or tool of any court. But while I thus say of him no more than I think his character and great talents deserve, I must tell him how grossly he has misapplied them in the politics of this country: I must tell him again how he has augmented our national debt; and how many lives he has lost during this war. I must tell him that he has done more against the privileges of the people, increased more the power of the crown, and injured more the constitution of the country, than any minister I can mention."

On the dissolution of the parliament this summer, Mr. Sheridan again came in with Mr. Monkton for Stafford; and, at the opening of the session the ensuing winter, a circumstance occurred, which occasioned some laughter in the house, and witticisms out of it. It happened that Pitt and Sheridan went up to take the oaths at the same time;

and the former having no money in his pocket, borrowed of his old antagonist two shillings to pay the fees.

The errors of the unfortunate treaty of Amiens began now to be developed too plainly to admit of palliation ; and parliament had scarcely finished its congratulations on the cessation of hostilities, before it was called upon to vote for the preparation of the means of defence.

The ambition and treachery of Buonaparte could no longer admit of doubt, even among those who had been accustomed to eulogize him for his moderation and magnanimity. Mr. Sheridan at one time considered this extraordinary man as actuated by noble principles ; but he now viewed him in a very different light, and did not hesitate to express his sentiments with freedom upon the character of the French government, and the necessity of opposing a boundary to its rapacious encroachments. His conduct, in this instance, formed a striking contrast to that of many of his friends, and of Mr. Fox in particular, who, during the summer, visited Paris, where the First Consul, at his levee, heaped upon him a profusion of empty compliments, calling him the orator of his country, and the friend of the human race, a style of eulogy which savoured too much of the revolutionary school to reflect honour either upon the person who adopted it, or the object to whom it was applied.

At a subsequent interview, when Mr. Fox dined

with Buonaparte, the latter affected admiration of the philanthropy of England in regard to the slave trade, observing, that as we were all members of the family of the west, it would be desirable to effect a union between the two worlds, and, by blending the black and the white, establish universal peace.

How such jargon could have imposed upon any man of common understanding, especially with the recollection of the fate of Toussaint in his memory, is most unaccountable ; yet we are told, upon unquestionable authority, that Mr. Fox had no doubt of the sincerity of Buonaparte in his pacific professions. Mr. Sheridan, who was not so easily deceived, took an early opportunity, after the meeting of parliament, to state his apprehensions that the French government had the worst designs against this country, and that the usurper, with all his cant of amity, was secretly bent upon adding England to his conquests. In the debate on the army estimates at the end of the year, Mr. Sheridan supported with great energy the resolution for an extensive military establishment, and he shewed the necessity of it by directing the attention of the house to the map of Europe, where, said he, nothing could be seen but France. “ It is in our power,” continued the orator, “ to measure her territory, to reckon her population : but it is scarcely within the grasp of any man’s mind to measure the ambition of Buonaparte. Why, when



all Europe bows down before him; why, when he has subdued the whole continent, he should feel such great respect for us I am at a loss to discover. If then it be true that his ambition is of that immeasurable nature, there are abundant and obvious reasons why it must be progressive—reasons much stronger than any that could have been used under the power of the Bourbons. They were ambitious, but it was not so necessary for them to feed their subjects with the spoils and plunder of war: they had the attachment of a long established family applied to them: they had the effect and advantage of hereditary succession. But in the very situation and composition of the power of Buonaparte there is a physical necessity for him to go on in this barter with his subjects, and to promise that he will make them the masters of the world if they will only consent on their part to be his slaves.”

After taking a brief survey of the different states which were brought under the controul of French power, or within the influence of its intrigues, Mr. Sheridan considered the character and views of Buonaparte as directed towards this nation. “Of his commercial talents,” said he, “I can be supposed to know but little; but, bred in camps, it cannot be imagined that his commercial knowledge is very great: and, indeed, if I am rightly informed, he is proceeding on the old plan of heavy duties and prohibitions. But he would go a shorter way to work with us. This country has credit,

capital, and commercial enterprize; and he may think, if he can subjugate us, that he shall be able to carry them off to France, like so many busts, pictures, and marbles. But, after all, he would find himself mistaken; that credit would wither under the gripe of power; that capital would sink into the earth, if trodden upon by the foot of a despot; and that commercial enterprize would lose all its vigour in the presence of an arbitrary government. No, Sir; instead of putting his nation apprentice to commerce, he has other ideas in his head. My humble apprehension is, that though in the tablet and volume of his mind there may be some marginal note about cashiering the King of Etruria, yet that the whole text is occupied with the destruction of England. This is the first vision that breaks upon him through the gleam of the morning; this is his last prayer at night, to whatever deity he addresses it, whether to Jupiter or Mahomet; to the goddess of battles or the goddess of reason. But, the only consolation is, it seems, that he is a great philosopher and philanthropist. I believe that this hyperphilanthropy has done more harm than ever it did good. Buonaparte, it is said, has discovered that we all belong to the western family. Sir, I confess I feel a sentiment of deep indignation, when I hear that this scrap of nonsense was uttered to one of the most enlightened of the human race. To this family party, however," added Mr. Sheridan, in a striking allusion,

which every member understood, "I do not wish to belong. He may invite persons if he please to dinner, and, like Lord Peter, say, that this tough crust is excellent mutton. He may toss a sceptre to the King of Etruria to play with, and keep a rod to scourge him in the corner. He may have thought at first that his Cisalpine republic was a fine-growing child, and may since have found it a ricketty bantling: but I feel contempt for all this mockery."

At the conclusion of this patriotic speech, which might have vied with any ever uttered within the walls of that house, Mr. Sheridan, in a very feeling manner, lamented the difference of opinion that subsisted between himself and Mr. Fox on the subject of peace. The latter could see nothing in the conduct of France to excite alarm, and he was disposed to rely with confidence on the assurances and good faith of its ruler; while the other, with a discernment which did infinite credit to his judgment, detected the fallacy and exposed the danger. "I perfectly agree," said he, "with my honourable friend, that war ought to be avoided, though he does not agree with me on the means best calculated to produce that effect. From any opinion he may express, I never differ but with the greatest reluctance. For him, my affection, my esteem, and my attachment, are unbounded, and will only end with my life. But I think that an important lesson may be learnt from the arrogance of Buonaparte. He says he is an instrument



in the hands of Providence; that he is an envoy of God. He says he is an instrument in the hands of Providence to restore Switzerland to happiness, and to elevate Italy to splendour and importance. I think he is an instrument in the hands of Providence to make the English love their constitution the better; to cling to it with more fondness; to hang round it with greater tenderness. Every man feels when he returns from France that he is coming from a dungeon to enjoy the light and life of British independence. Whatever abuses exist, we shall still look with pride and pleasure upon the substantial blessings we yet enjoy. I believe, also, that he is an instrument in the hands of Providence to make us more liberal in our political differences, and to render us determined, with one hand and one heart, to oppose any aggression that may be made upon us. If that aggression be made, my honourable friend will, I am sure, agree with me, that we ought to meet it with a conviction of the truth of this assertion, that a country which has achieved such greatness has no retreat in littleness; that if we could be content to abandon everything, we should find no safety in poverty, no security in abject submission: finally, that we ought to meet it with a fixed determination to perish in the same grave with the honour and independence of the country."

It deserves observation, that while Mr. Sheridan rendered this essential service to his country, by



an exposition of the perils with which it was menaced, Mr. Fox could see nothing to fear on the side of France but a rivalry in commerce; and even Mr. Wilberforce, who had on most occasions supported the necessity of the preceding war, now gave it as his opinion that England might be safe and happy by resting contented in her insular situation, and abjuring the continent. This opposite change of sentiment was singularly curious; but history has proved that Mr. Sheridan had formed a correct estimate of the principles of Buonaparte, when he maintained that nothing short of the subjugation of this country would satisfy the ambition of that extraordinary chieftain. In the same patriotic spirit, on the renewal of hostilities, an event which he had clearly anticipated, Mr. Sheridan stood forth as the advocate of the volunteers against Windham, who treated the confidence reposed in this species of defence with great contempt, and affected an apprehension that the regular service would be injured by the extension of a practice which had more the shew of military force than any efficient strength. Mr. Sheridan, on the contrary, thought the system most admirably calculated for the security of the kingdom; and he seems to have carried his predilection for it to a degree of enthusiastic extravagance, merely out of opposition to the prejudices of his old acquaintance. He adduced, with considerable effect, the benefits that had resulted from

the adoption of this plan in Ireland during the American war; and he maintained that a force consisting of the regular army, the militia, volunteers, and yeomanry, was peculiarly calculated for defence, because it suited the habits, circumstances, and constitutional liberties of the country. Great standing armies, he observed, however disciplined and powerful, were not to be implicitly trusted; of which he instanced the case of what had so recently happened in France, where the regular soldiers had been seduced to overturn the monarchy. Throughout this speech, Mr. Sheridan evinced the most ardent patriotism; and in nothing more than in calling for unanimity at that awful juncture. He did not, he said, call upon gentlemen to give their opinions. He did not wish by any means to dictate to them the course of political conduct which they should pursue. Within the walls of that house, every man had a right wholly and unequivocally to declare his judgment on public affairs. He might, however, be permitted to entreat of gentlemen, that as the period of their separation was now at hand, they would not utter such sentiments out of doors; that they would not resort to any measures which could damp the increasing ardour and energy of the country; that they would not lend the sanction of their names to opinions, which, coming from unauthorized sources, had never been received with any portion of favour. All that he asked

of them was to suspend their political animosities for a moment, and not to represent the servants of the crown as weak and inefficient, at a time when confidence in their exertions was so necessary to the salvation of the country; not to waste that time and those talents in party spirit and intrigue which might be so much more worthily employed in performing the sublime and animated duties of patriotism. This was a moment which called on every honest man to unite heart and hand in support of every thing dear to us as a great and free people, against the greatest danger with which we were ever threatened. Such were the counsels which this eloquent man recommended at that season; though how little his own practice had corresponded with the advice, at a period equally perilous, needs no recital. He concluded by moving the thanks of the house to the volunteers, and a return of the names of the various corps to be entered on the journals, both which resolutions were carried in the affirmative. Something having been said on the subject of the application of the Prince of Wales to have a command in the event of an invasion, which offer His Majesty did not think proper to accept, Mr. Sheridan expressed himself in these terms: "I believe no man who knows me will doubt for an instant the respect, attachment, and veneration I entertain for the virtuous and public spirit of that illustrious personage; but I am not to be tutored or schooled

by any man as to the way in which I should manifest my feelings, and discharge my duty towards his royal highness. I am not to be told, that unless the offer which has done him the highest honour shall be treated in a manner satisfactory to my honourable friend and me, I shall decline to support His Majesty's government on this trying occasion. It is not necessary for me to make any parade or profession of my zealous wishes for the interest or character of his royal highness. It is justly due to that character, to state that which must constitute its highest praise, that he has offered in the noblest manner to stand forward for the nation's defence; and I am fully persuaded that the offer was not less graciously received by the persons to whom it was made, than it is felt with gratitude by the country at large. I am, however, confident, that whatever might have been the effect of that offer, his royal highness would not be friendly to any observations calculated to excite public discontent, or to disturb public unanimity: on the contrary, I am fully persuaded that he would rather enter as a private in the ranks of his armed countrymen, than countenance any discussion which could tend to divide the feelings of the people." The correspondence which arose out of the offer made by the prince excited great attention at the time, and was published in the daily papers; but at whose instance did not appear. Mr. Sheridan was supposed to



have had a share in the composition of the letters of the prince ; and from the manner in which the business was brought forward in the House of Commons, it was strongly suspected that he gave them to the public. His zeal for the prince was now as warm as sometime before it had been the reverse ; and of his attachment, he gave a proof, when Mr. Addington moved for a grant of sixty thousand pounds to his royal highness, on which occasion he observed that the proposition was equally satisfactory to those who wished to reinstate the prince in his constitutional splendour, and to those who watched with a jealous eye the expenditure of the public money. There was, however, one thing, he said, which did not appear to be admitted, and which he was particularly desirous should be stated ; and that was, that the prince, so far from burthening the public, had, on the contrary, made a considerable sacrifice for them ; which was an undoubted fact, that ought to be made universally known in the country.

Some days after this, a motion was made for a committee to enquire into the embarrassments of the Prince of Wales, for devising the most effectual means of relieving them as speedily as possible, in order to enable his royal highness to resume the splendour and dignity due to his exalted station. This motion gave rise to a debate, in which one or two members happening to let drop some invidious observations, deprecating the assumption of

state and rank as trappings of no importance, Mr. Sheridan, in reply, very judiciously and humourously exposed the revolutionary and levelling sentiment in this manner:—"In order to bring this system home to gentlemen's minds, let it be applied to the house; let it be supposed that the Speaker possessed sufficient dignity, and commanded sufficient respect by his virtues; let the chair then be removed; let the other badges be stripped off; let that bauble, the mace, be taken away; let the fine house building for him be demolished; let the state-coach be laid down; and instead of proceeding in it to St. James's, attended by a grand procession of members in their private carriages, let him go on foot with the addresses, covered with a warm surtout, and honoured with the privilege of an umbrella, in case of rain. Let the judges be conducted by no sheriffs, or sheriffs' attendants, to the assize towns; but let the chief-justice go down in the mail-coach, and the puisne judges content themselves with travelling as outside passengers. Let the Lord Mayor, instead of going to Westminster Hall in the state barge, accompanied by the several companies, go in a plain wherry, without any attendants; and instead of returning to feast on turtle at Guildhall, with the great officers of state and foreign ambassadors, let him content himself with stopping in his way back and take a beef steak at Dolly's chophouse."

This certainly is the only proper answer to a

narrow maxim, which, in taking away the external dignity of office, and abridging the splendour of royalty, would naturally create a spirit of insubordination, with all the fierce passions which tend to overturn a state. Milton, indeed, is said to have given as the reason of his approbation of republicanism, that the trappings of monarchy would maintain a moderate commonwealth; but the times in which he lived furnished a notable example of this scheme of frugal simplicity. When the levellers set aside royalty with the gradations of rank, and when the puritans converted St. Paul's church into a stable, under the pretext of redressing grievances, and enlightening the people, they introduced a system of sequestration and oppression, which paralyzed industry, banished the liberal arts, and left hardly any thing but poverty, ignorance, and knavery in the seats of learning, and amidst the ruins of palaces.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

*On Mr. Sheridan's Support of the Addington Administration.—His Defence of Lord St. Vincent.—Severe Remark of Mr. Pitt.—Return of that Statesman to Power.—Renewal of Opposition.—Inconsistency of Mr. Sheridan.—His Praise of the Prince of Wales.—Failure of Mr. Thomas Sheridan in his Election at Leskeard.—Anecdote of Sheridan and Dundas.—Sheridan appointed temporary Receiver-General of Cornwall.—His Tour in Scotland.*

THE support given by Mr. Sheridan to ministers at this time, and his readiness to interpose in their defence on every occasion, gave rise to many conjectures; especially as in this respect his conduct was far from being in unison with that of Mr. Fox. There were not wanting persons who represented him as intriguing to form a coalition between his friend and Mr. Addington, while some did not scruple to say that he was endeavouring to secure an elevated situation for himself, without consulting the great leader under whose banner he had so long served.

These rumours received some countenance from the known intimacy which subsisted between him and some of the leading members of that adminis-



tration; as also from the esteem in which Mr. Addington was held by the Prince of Wales. But what contributed most to strengthen the idea that Mr. Sheridan had a coalition in contemplation, was the desire which he repeatedly expressed at this crisis that his friends would lay aside all their differences in opinion for the purpose of strengthening the hands of government. Now it was known on all sides that Mr. Fox, and several of his most efficient adherents, were radically hostile to the administration of Mr. Addington, which they considered as nothing more than the shadow of that of Mr. Pitt; and therefore this call on the part of Mr. Sheridan was looked upon even by them as more indicative of his own wish to get into place than to provide a mere buttress to a tottering edifice.

Overtures to Mr. Sheridan were certainly made at this period; but though ministers would have been very glad of his aid as a coadjutor, they would have derived little advantage from this accession, unless accompanied by the strength of the party. It was, however, impossible to save the administration when Mr. Pitt declared himself adverse to its measures; and afterwards Sheridan, dexterously enough, justified the support which he gave to it, on the plea that he did it to prevent the return of that great man to the direction of the state. This perhaps was the case; but it was a manœuvre in politics which did little credit to

his integrity, and reduces the value of that display of patriotism which he made at this period. That enmity to Pitt should have guided his conduct in parliament, and actuated him in the formation of his plans and connexions, betrayed something more like private revenge than public spirit. Whatever may have been the feelings or the faults of Mr. Pitt, the country alone occupied his thoughts, and how to serve it effectually was the sole object of his ambition. Of this a more striking instance could hardly be given than his recommendation of an administration upon a broad basis; and his opposition to Mr. Addington, when he found the measures adopted by him and his colleagues inadequate to the great object of national defence, in a season of peculiar danger, plainly evinced the perfect independence of his mind.

One of the first acts performed after the ill-fated treaty of Amiens was the complete dismantlement of the navy, and the introduction of a sweeping plan of economy, as it was called, in the dock yards. This was done at a time when the French government gave signs of increasing activity in the same department, and expressed an open intention of encouraging, upon a large scale, manufactures and commerce, which of course would have led to the establishment of a large naval force. With these prospects, the experience of recent events, and a knowledge of the French character, did the

English admiralty begin with the utmost eagerness to reduce the service, stop contracts for building; sell off the stores, and dismiss the artificers.

Policy like this was not very likely to moderate the sentiments of Buonaparte, or to bind him more strictly to the faithful discharge of his engagements. When he saw how anxious we were for a long repose, and that too without taking previous care to see all our outworks properly secured, he began to take advantage of our apathy, by making encroachments on his neighbours, and subverting the liberties of Switzerland. Such was the state of things on the renewal of the war, in consequence of which Mr. Pitt brought forward two motions for a return of the naval force, and an enquiry into its condition, particularly with respect to contracts for gun-vessels, a species of defence necessary to repel the threatened invasion. A strong case was made out against the Board of Admiralty on this occasion; but ministers, by refusing the official documents, which could alone have substantiated the charge, prevented that public crimination of the justice of which no dispassionate and qualified man had any doubt. Mr. Sheridan entered upon the defence of Lord St. Vincent, who was at the head of the Admiralty, with great zeal; and his speech on the subject displayed so much professional knowledge, as, when all circumstances were considered, plainly shewed that he had been well instructed. Previous to his rising on this occasion, Mr. Wilberforce

had delivered his sentiments in favour of the motion for enquiry, assigning as one reason, that from all the information he could obtain, there was a general spirit of dissatisfaction at the conduct of the Admiralty. This evidence Mr. Sheridan considered as alike unparliamentary and unjust, forgetting that he and his party had invariably been in the practice of bringing charges against ministers upon similar grounds; and forgetting also, that this was not a trial, but an enquiry into the causes of an evil that was obvious to every man's senses, and tending to throw the country into the most perilous situation. It is not a little singular, that while Mr. Fox and his other friends should have voted in favour of the enquiry, in the presumption that the result would be a compleat vindication of Lord St. Vincent, Mr. Sheridan strenuously resisted it, fully convinced, as he said, that such a motion was only calculated to gratify the corrupt, to frown upon reform, and to assail the reputation of a gallant officer, whose claims to public gratitude could only be equalled by the esteem and attachment of all the great and the good. This, to be sure, was a very convenient mode of removing suspicion and getting rid of a specific charge; but as it must be supposed to have been the best which consultation could devise or eloquence enforce, the country had nothing to do but to acquiesce in the decision, and leave posterity to examine its merits. Mr. Pitt in his reply to what had fallen from those who



resisted his motion, took particular notice of the extraordinary speech of Mr. Sheridan, and said: "But we are amused with a brilliant flash of eloquence (not lately a source of ordinary entertainment in this house), and we are told, all this scheme of gun-vessels is a job. This sentiment, cloathed in a wandering meteor, which fixed its ray of indignation upon me, shall not so far dazzle my organs of vision as to prevent me from discovering the way by which I may relieve myself from the terrors of its effulgence. It is not necessary to conclude, because a service has been converted into a job, that it is an useless service. If pernicious food had been given to the honourable gentleman, he would not conceive it to be a reason for abstaining from all nourishment; so, in the former case, we must learn to distinguish between accident and substance; and rejecting what is injurious, retain what is valuable."

While Mr. Sheridan was in alliance, though not in place, with Mr. Addington, his great friend, Mr. Fox, was actually co-operating, though not by concert, with Mr. Pitt, in opposing the measures of an imbecile administration. The consequence was, as might have been expected, that the majorities decreased so rapidly, as to render a resignation on the part of Mr. Addington and his associates indispensable. A new cabinet was accordingly formed under the direction of Mr. Pitt, who would gladly have extended its basis so as to

comprehend Mr. Fox; but in this he was prevented by higher authority.

Mr. Sheridan being now again in his element of opposition, commenced hostilities by a vigorous assault upon the plan brought forward for increasing the military force. This conduct was not very consistent with the energetic exhortations to unanimity in the great object of national defence so often made of late by him, nor with the sentiment which he expressed in favour of an extensive constitutional force of a diversified character, formidable to the enemy, and having in its composition a facility of separation. The idea dwelt upon so emphatically in his vindication of the volunteer system corresponded in all its features with the very system which he now combated, as ludicrous, impracticable, and dangerous.

But the speech of Mr. Sheridan on the discussion of this question exhibited little more than the labour of a disappointed mind, to turn any thing into an engine of attack upon the object of its resentment. He expatiated on a variety of topics, and came, as he professed, furnished with abundant materials to confound the minister and his friends; but upon rummaging his pockets, the notes were not to be found, which produced a shout of laughter at the expense of the orator, who was not, however, easily dashed out of countenance, but proceeded in his usual desultory way to reprobate the measure, and to vilify the whole

body of ministers, with the exception of Mr. Canning, whom he complimented repeatedly with the title of his right honourable friend. At the close, Mr. Sheridan, alluding to the exclusion of Mr. Fox by His Majesty, thought proper to pass a very high encomium upon the Prince of Wales, which, however just it might be, was very injudicious, when introduced, as it were, in the way of contrast. Yet the observation was remarkable, because it placed the generosity of his royal highness, in pardoning the ill treatment which he had experienced, in a strong point of view. After noticing that it would be indecorous to express any conjectures on the cause of the exclusion, Mr. Sheridan observed: "Of the personage to whom it refers, I cannot speak from any particular knowledge; but of him who is next in rank, I can say, that the illustrious person, whose name I know my duty too well to mention, who stood forward at the commencement of the war, displaying a noble example of his wish to promote unanimity, to rally all parties round the standard of the country, entertains no political prejudice against any public man, though, God knows, he has had much to forgive. Far, however, from indulging resentment, I am sure that he would be forward to accept, or to call for the services of any political character who could contribute in this great crisis to the safety of the empire."

Considering the number of parties then in par-

liament, it was not a matter to excite wonder that the minister should be in possession of a very small majority at the outset of his career, when he had to encounter some of his oldest connexions. Mr. Sheridan took advantage of this schism, and inferred, that, because Mr. Pitt was weak in numerical strength, he ought, like his predecessor, to resign. There was, however, too great a difference in the circumstances to give any colour to the reasoning; and Mr. Pitt very properly replied, that, broad as the hint might be, it was not broad enough for him to take it. He had still hopes, he said, of being able to carry the bill, which he considered as necessary for the security of the country; but that if he failed, the disappointment would not be a defeat; for if this particular plan were rejected, there were others to be tried; and his best exertions would be made to save the country. The measure was carried; but the opposition of Mr. Sheridan was renewed in the ensuing session, when he moved for the repeal of the act in a very copious and animated speech, full of invective and humour, but without obtaining his object at that time, though he succeeded when the great author of the bill was no more.

Among other things which contributed to sour the temper of Mr. Sheridan on the change of ministers, and the accession of Mr. Pitt, was the failure which his son experienced in his attempt to get into parliament for Leskeard, in Cornwall,



where, though he had but few votes, the under sheriff took upon him to add a schedule to the return, purporting that the election was doubtful. Mr. Huskisson, the successful candidate, was in consequence obliged to petition the house on the subject, which produced another from young Sheridan. In the discussion of the business there appeared such foul practice, that Mr. Dundas could not refrain from animadverting on the parties in very strong language. Mr. Sheridan, with some petulance, undertook the defence of his friend, the under sheriff, and very imprudently threw out some sarcastic observations on the former profession of Mr. Dundas, as an advocate. This drew a retort from Dundas, who told him that if he presumed to take such a liberty again, he might expect to have the history of his own life and pursuits pretty fully exposed; adding, by way of stinging application, that, in the singular transaction which gave rise to this debate, he was willing to think that Mr. Thomas Sheridan was not so much concerned as his father.

Sheridan was wise enough to take no notice of the last observation, but endeavoured to soften matters, by saying that he was not aware any reference to the former profession of Mr. Dundas could have been disagreeable to him, particularly as it was one of the highest credit. He observed also, that he had himself completed his terms with a view to the law as a profession; and that he was

now very sorry he had ever relinquished that pursuit. After some delays, Mr. Huskisson was declared the sitting member; and the under sheriff, notwithstanding all the exertions of his eloquent friend, was committed to Newgate, from whence he obtained his release on petitioning the house, and receiving a suitable reprimand from the Speaker.

On the death of Lord Eliot, this year, the Prince of Wales conferred the vacant office of receiver-general of the Duchy of Cornwall upon the late Lord Lake; but as that nobleman was then serving in India, and could not hold the situation legally, Mr. Sheridan was appointed to fill the place till his return; and a promise was given by him that he would then resign it, which he did; but when Lord Lake died in 1808, the prince gave him a patent of the office for his life.

After the breaking up of parliament, Mr. Sheridan spent some months in Scotland, where his son held a military appointment under Earl Moira. The reception which the celebrated orator experienced in every part of his tour was very flattering, and he repeatedly spoke of it, in public and private, with great pleasure, and grateful feeling.

On the opening of the parliamentary campaign in the following year, Mr. Sheridan, and the combined force of the opposition, appeared confident of being able to shake the minister from his seat: and as he had carried his bill for the national defence by a small majority, that was selected for

the object of attack. The task of conducting the operation was entrusted to Mr. Sheridan, who performed his part with great ability; but his speech, on a motion for the repeal of the act, was interlarded with so much personal abuse, and attempts to be ludicrous, as to give great offence even to some of his own party. One of the worst of his sarcasms was thrown out against the Duke of Portland, who, he said, was ready to fill a place in any cabinet; and that no minister could be distressed for one to fill up a vacancy in his cabinet, while this obliging personage was to be found. Yet it was in the recollection of all who heard this coarse invective, that the duke had been the intimate friend and patron of Sheridan, who bestowed upon his grace in the very same assembly a profusion of praises; and, among other things, observed, that if there was one man more than another of whose friendship he was proud, it was the Duke of Portland. After this proof of gratitude and friendship, the attack upon Lord Melville's talents was not likely to occasion surprise, or to make any impression upon those who remembered that a few months before the orator had experienced a severe castigation from that nobleman. But his lordship was now out of hearing; and Mr. Sheridan would not lose his jest, which of itself was a good one, though certainly neither well timed, nor properly applied. Alluding to the different situations which had been filled by Lord Melville

he said, " I remember a story told respecting Mr. Garrick, who was once applied to by an eccentric Scotchman to introduce a production of his on the stage. The Scotchman was such a good-humoured fellow, that he was called, ' honest Johnny M'Cree.' Johnny wrote four acts of a tragedy, which he shewed to Mr. Garrick, who dissuaded him from finishing it, telling him that his talent did not lie that way; so Johnny abandoned the tragedy, and set about writing a comedy. When this was finished, he shewed it to Mr. Garrick, who found it to be still more exceptionable than the tragedy, and, of course, could not be persuaded to bring it forward on the stage. This surprised poor Johnny, and he remonstrated: ' Nay now, David (said Johnny), did you not tell me that my talents did not lie in tragedy?' ' Yes,' replied Garrick, ' but I did not tell you that they lay in comedy.' ' Then,' exclaimed Johnny, ' gin they dinna lie there, where the deel ditha lie, mon?' Now, unless," said Sheridan, " the noble lord at the head of the Admiralty has the same reasoning in his mind as Johnny M'Cree, he cannot possibly suppose that his incapacity for the direction of the war department necessarily qualifies him for the presidency of the naval. Perhaps, if the noble lord be told that he has no talents for the latter, he may exclaim with honest Johnny M'Cree, ' Gin they dinna lie there, where the deel ditha lie, mon?'"



But neither the arguments nor the raillery of Mr. Sheridan could succeed in this instance; and he had the mortification to see the majority in support of the minister increased, notwithstanding the attempts made by him to persuade the country gentlemen to join the standard of opposition. Mr. Pitt, in reply, bestowed some unmerciful blows upon the political Thersites, of whom he drew this forcible and characteristic portraiture: "He seldom condescends to favour us with a display of his extraordinary powers of imagination and of fancy, but, when he does come forward, we are prepared for a grand performance. No subject comes amiss to him, however remote from the question before the house. All that his fancy suggests at the time, or that he has collected from others; all that he can utter in the ebullition of the moment; all that he has slept on and matured; are combined and produced for our entertainment. All his hoarded repartees—all his matured jests—the full contents of his common-place book—all his severe invectives—all his bold and hardy assertions—all that he has been treasuring up for days and months—he collects into one mass, which he kindles into a blaze of eloquence, and out it comes altogether, whether it has any relation to the subject of debate or not."

Never was a more faithful sketch delineated; and the exhibition of it operated with effect upon the feelings of the person whom it represented.

In his reply, Mr. Sheridan was more than commonly vituperative; and, forgetting his own habits, he retorted upon the minister in an allusion to his convivial hours at Walmer Castle, where he and his right honourable friend, Dundas, had another Alexander's feast. "Whether they had a Timothens of their party," added Sheridan, "report did not say: the jolly god, however, was not absent. There, like Alexander, 'they seized a torch with fury to destroy;' and if they did not succeed, perhaps it was because there was no Thais at Walmer Castle." In conclusion, Sheridan vindicated the support which he had given to the administration of Lord Sidmouth, and at the same time accused Pitt of treachery towards that nobleman, in first recommending him to the sovereign, and afterwards opposing his measures. But neither the defence nor the charge could be maintained in reason; for Sheridan very imprudently acknowledged that he had assisted the late minister merely to prevent the return of Mr. Pitt, which was any thing but a patriotic motive; and the conduct of the latter, so far from being censurable, deserves the highest praise, when the state of the country is considered, and the danger to which it was exposed by the puerility of the means adopted for its security.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

*Death of Mr. Pitt.—New Administration.—Obstacles to the Appointment of Mr. Sheridan.—His high Expectations.—Prudent Advice of Mr. Fox.—Accepts the Office of Treasurer of the Navy.—Re-election for Stafford.—Decline of Eloquence.—Miserable Efforts of Wit.—His Tribute of Respect to the Memory of the late Minister.—Splendid Fête at Somerset House.—Death of Mr. Charles Francis Sheridan.—His Character.—Death of Mr. Fox.—Mr. Sheridan nominated for Westminster, but declines in favour of Lord Percy.—His Speech on that Occasion.—Dissolution of Parliament.—Violent Contest for Westminster.—Success of Sir Samuel Hood and Mr. Sheridan.—Petition against the latter proved frivolous and vexatious.—Anecdote of Dennis O'Brien.*

THE opposition had gained such ground by the proceedings against Lord Melville as to inspire them with strong confidence of being able to weaken the power of Mr. Pitt, when the death of that illustrious statesman gave them full possession of the good things which had so long been the objects of their ambition. His Majesty, indeed, would gladly have sought for confidential servants in any other quarter; but the decided part taken by Lord Grenville left no alternative, and a new cabinet was accordingly formed, under his lord-

ship's direction. Some difficulties occurred, where clashing interests were to be reconciled, and where the claimants for preferment were both numerous and clamorous. Mr. Sheridan, in particular, set up lofty pretensions on the ground of twenty-five years of service, and he was supported in his demands by a personage of the first distinction. Still there were objections to his occupying any of the first offices, which could not easily be got over; and even Mr. Fox himself was unwilling to run any risk by insisting upon an appointment which might eventually, from the known habits of his friend, have injured his colleagues. He advised Mr. Sheridan to accept of a patent place, which would at once have secured him a competency for life, and freed him from fatigue and responsibility. This was good counsel, but it was ill taken; and at length, when the Board of Control was refused, which had been pretty much insisted upon, he thought proper to accept the treasurership of the navy, being sworn of the privy council on the seventh of February, and gazetted on the fifteenth of the same month. Having thus vacated his seat in parliament, he was chosen again for Stafford, without any opposition, which was his last return for that borough, after the long period of twenty-six years.

It is not a little remarkable that the vigorous spirit of eloquence, which had so often enlivened debate, and astonished the public, now grew languid



and vapid, as if there had been something in the atmosphere of an official department to depress the force of genius, and to confine its exertions within the restriction of forms and orders. Mr. Sheridan displayed very little of that activity as a senator, after his elevation, which had uniformly distinguished him when he roved at large, annoying ministers, and perplexing their measures. Then his fancy was inexhaustible, and his wit was always amusing; but now he appeared as if his mind laboured under the pressure of restraint, and his occasional attempts at humour disgusted even his admirers. A remarkable instance of this occurred within a few days after his advancement, when the question was agitated respecting the admission of Lord Ellenborough to a seat in the cabinet. This certainly was a subject that called for serious argument; instead of which, Mr. Sheridan gave the whole such an air of ridicule, as contributed very much to lessen both himself and his associates. When he should have exerted his ingenuity or sophistry, in shewing the propriety of allowing the chief-justice of England to examine cases that were to come before him in his judicial capacity, he totally passed over the question, and began to play the droll upon the members of the late administration, observing, how cold they must feel on that side of the house, since they were so few in number, and particularly as one, Lord Castlereagh, had lost his *Indian Shawl*, meaning the Board of

Control; another, Mr. Canning, had lost his *naval cloak*, the treasurership of the navy; and a third, Mr. Perceval, his *graceful professional robe*, as attorney-general.

To such a degree could this man of talent descend in the art of punning upon a matter of grave import, and one that, beyond all doubt, very much affected the rights and liberties of the subject.

Mr. Sheridan appeared to much greater advantage, when, on a motion for the repeal of the additional force bill, he took occasion to justify himself and his colleagues from the charge of bearing hostility to the memory of Mr. Pitt, with whom that measure originated. "As for me," said Mr. Sheridan, "there were many who flattered that great man more than I, and some who feared him more; but there was no man who had a higher respect for his transcendent talents, his matchless eloquence, and the greatness of his soul; and yet it has often been my fate to oppose his measures. I may have considered that there was somewhat too much of loftiness in his mind, which could not bend to advice, or scarcely bear co-operation. I might have considered, that as a statesman his measures were not adequate to the situation of the country in the present times; but I always thought his purpose and his hope was for the greatness and security of the empire."

This was a liberal declaration; yet if it really

expressed the sentiments of the speaker, he had much to explain and answer for in having repeatedly accused the illustrious dead with forming deep and deadly designs against the constitution. It merits observation, also, that while Mr. Sheridan, on various occasions, represented the late minister as deficient in financial knowledge, and as an empiric in political economy, Mr. Fox, on the contrary, paid the highest tribute of praise to his plans; but a still greater eulogium was bestowed upon the wisdom of Mr. Pitt's administration, in the continuance and extension of his system, by the very persons who had been his constant opponents. Whether they improved upon his basis is a very different thing; but the fact that they never departed from it, to introduce any scheme of their own, reflected more glory upon his memory than credit upon their sincerity. In one respect, a striking difference characterized the new administration; and that was the social spirit of its members, manifested in the splendour and frequency of their entertainments. The town was amused every day by the announcement of festive parties, and the description of those which had taken place. There seemed, indeed, a sort of competition among the ministers who should give the most sumptuous dinners, and furnish the daily prints with accounts of the most splendid assemblies. Mr. Sheridan had the honour of surpassing all his colleagues by the magnificence of an entertainment

which he gave on Sunday, the twenty-fifth of May; and a masqued ball the two following days. On each occasion the Prince of Wales honoured him with his presence, and condescended to express his great satisfaction at the treatment which he had experienced.

The spectacle on Monday, which was perfectly theatrical, began at seven in the evening, with the christening of the infant son of Mr. Thomas Sheridan, and the child of Mrs. Sheridan's sister. The grand music-room then received the company, the principal part of whom did not arrive till ten o'clock; and an hour afterwards the masque commenced; after which was a supper; and then came the dancing, where the Chancellor of England, Lord Erskine, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Henry Petty, particularly distinguished themselves till past eight in the morning.

Such was the thoughtless extravagance of a person who at that time was loaded with debts, and perpetually dunned by clamorous creditors; and such was the inconsistency of ministers of state in a season of extreme difficulty, when the nation was involved in war with a foe of the most tremendous power, and the people were pressed down by increased taxation.

In July, this year, died at Tunbridge Wells Mr. Charles Francis Sheridan. He had been many years a member of the Irish parliament, and was under secretary of state for the war department in that king-



dom, previous to the affair of the regency, on which occasion he resigned both his office and his seat. He was a man of considerable abilities, more solid than showy; and in principle quite the reverse of his brother, who never lived with him upon good terms. At an early period he was employed as secretary to the British embassy in Sweden, where he witnessed the revolution effected by Gustavus, of which event he wrote and published a very luminous narrative. He was also the author of several political pamphlets, particularly one upon the "True Principles of Civil Liberty, and of Free Government," printed in 1793, at a time when his brother was advocating the very doctrines which in this able tract were exposed as dangerous, and refuted as fallacious. Mr. Charles Sheridan left a large family, and among others, two sons, who died in the east, where they filled situations of trust with great credit. His widow died at Worcester of a paralysis, in 1813.

The death of Mr. Fox was an event of more serious import to Mr. Sheridan than that of his brother, and was probably much more keenly felt by him, though the intercourse between these old friends had been for some time so much suspended as to attract public observation. There was, indeed, if any faith is to be put in the testimony of some persons who enjoyed the last confidence of Mr. Fox, a visible dislike on the part of that great man to the visits of Mr. Sheridan, which gave rise

to various conjectures and stories, most of them, perhaps, fallacious or exaggerated, but all tending to shew what little faith is due to professions of political friendship. When, however, a public funeral was resolved upon by the relations and associates of Mr. Fox, the whole management of the procession was committed to the judgment of Mr. Sheridan, who attended as a principal mourner on the occasion, at the head of the volunteers of Somerset House.

In the mean time meetings were held by the electors of Westminster, to consider of a proper person to succeed Mr. Fox in the representation of that city; and many were disposed to support the pretensions of Mr. Sheridan as a candidate, on the ground of public principle, and in an assurance that by so doing they should gratify his own inclinations. Of his wishes in this respect, indeed, there could be little doubt, for he had never taken any pains to conceal them; but an unexpected opposition arose in a quarter which would not allow of competition on his part. The Duke of Northumberland having expressed his desire that Lord Percy should be elected, the wish of his grace was no sooner known, than it met with the whole weight of ministerial influence, as well as the cheerful concurrence of the leading inhabitants of Westminster. Still, some of the zealous friends of Mr. Sheridan persevered in their intentions of bringing him forward on this occasion; and a

numerous meeting was held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on the eighteenth of September; where, though Mr. Dennis O'Brien proposed Lord Percy, the majority decidedly approved of Mr. Sheridan, who, on his part, made a very long speech, in which, after drawing the character of his deceased friend in glowing colours, he declined the contest. In this address, he said: "I have received a friendly though public caution, that I may risk the confidence and attachment of my friends at Stafford by such a pursuit. I thank my monitor for his anxiety on that account, but he may rest assured that I know my constituents better. I have before declined an offer of support for this city upon a general election. My gratitude and devotion to my friends at Stafford bind me to seek no other. I have been six times chosen by them, which is a proof, at least, that when once elected I am not quarrelsome with my constituents."

Having stated the general uniformity of principle that had subsisted between him and Mr. Fox, he admitted that sometimes this union of sentiment had sustained a rupture, and that to a very serious extent. "It is true," he remarked, "there have been occasions upon which I have differed with him—painful recollections of the most painful moments of my political life! Nor were there wanting those who endeavoured to represent these differences as a departure from the homage which his

superior mind, though unclaimed by him, was entitled to, and from the allegiance of friendship which our hearts all swore to him; but never was the genuine and confiding texture of his soul more manifest than on such occasions: he knew that nothing on earth could detach me from him; and he resented insinuations against the sincerity and integrity of a friend, which he would not have noticed had they been pointed against himself. With such a man to have battled in the cause of genuine liberty; with such a man to have struggled against the inroads of oppression and corruption; with such an example before me, to have to boast that I never in my life gave one vote in parliament that was not on the side of freedom; is the congratulation that attends the retrospect of my public life. His friendship was the pride and honour of my days. I never, for one moment, regretted to share with him the difficulties, the calumnies, and sometimes even the dangers that attended a honourable course. And now, reviewing my past political life, were the option possible that I should retread the path, I solemnly and deliberately declare that I would prefer to pursue the same course; to bear up under the same pressure; to abide by the same principles; and remain by his side an exile from power, distinction, and emolument, rather than be at this moment a splendid example of successful servility or prosperous apostacy, though cloathed with



power, honour, titles, gorged with sinecures, and lord of hoards obtained from the plunder of the people.”

What followed in the laboured effort to prove the independence of his conduct on this occasion was altogether so extraordinary, as to excite a suspicion that he was actually at that very moment bending under the influence of a superior will, and making a virtue of necessity. “ Illiberal warnings,” said he, “ have been held out, most unauthoritatively I know, that by persevering in the present contest I may risk my official situation ; and if I retire, I am aware that minds as coarse and illiberal may assign the dread of that as my motive. To such insinuations I shall scorn to make any other reply than a reference to the whole of my past political career. I consider it as no boast to say, that any one who has struggled through such a portion of life as I have, without obtaining an office, is not likely to abandon his principles to retain one when acquired. If riches do not give independence, the next best thing to be very rich is to have been used to be very poor. But independence is not allied to wealth, to birth, to rank, to power, to titles, or to honour. Independence is in the mind of a man, or it is no where. On this ground were I to decline the contest, I should scorn the imputation that should bring the purity of my purpose into doubt. No minister can expect to find in me a servile vassal. No minister

can expect from me the abandonment of any principle I have avowed, or any pledge I have given. I know not that I have hitherto shrunk in place from opinions I have maintained while in opposition. Did there exist a minister of different cast from any I know in being, were he to attempt to exact from me a different conduct, my office should be at his service to-morrow. Such a ministry might strip me of my situation, in some respects of considerable emolument, but he could not strip me of the proud conviction that I was right: he could not strip me of my own self-esteem; he could not strip me, I think, of some portion of the confidence and good opinion of the people. But I am noticing the calumnious threat I allude to more than it deserves. There can be no peril, I venture to assert, under the present government, in the free exercise of discretion, such as belongs to the present question. I therefore disclaim the merit of putting any thing to hazard. If I have missed the opportunity of obtaining all the support I might, perhaps, have had on the present occasion, from a very scrupulous delicacy, which I think became and was incumbent upon me, but which I by no means conceive to have been a fit rule for others, I cannot repent it. While the slightest aspiration of breath passed those lips, now closed for ever—while one drop of life's blood beat in that heart, now cold for ever—I could not, I

ought not to have acted otherwise than I did.— Now I come with a very embarrassed feeling to that declaration which I yet think you must have expected from me, but which I make with reluctance, because, from the marked approbation I have experienced from you, I fear that with reluctance you will receive it.—*I feel myself under the necessity of retiring from this contest.*”

This declaration was far from being satisfactory to the assembly, which, consisting almost entirely of those persons who were attached to the interests of Mr. Sheridan, would not be dissuaded from nominating him by excuses that implied compulsion rather than inclination. There can be little doubt, indeed, that secretly he approved of their resolution, and that he wished to be brought in for Westminster, as it were, by the voice of the electors, while he appeared reluctant; otherwise he would have signified his dissent through the medium of the papers, at the time when Lord Percy announced himself as a candidate. His lordship, however, was elected, but did not take his seat, as a dissolution of parliament occurred about a month afterwards; and Lord Gardner, the other member, being created a British peer, an opening was thereby made for Mr. Sheridan, who, notwithstanding his pledge to the good people of Stafford, immediately became a candidate for Westminster.

Lord Percy declined the contest, in compliance with the commands of his father, who would not

suffer him to stand with Mr. Sheridan, on account of his recent behaviour, which certainly was extremely equivocal, and marked by strong appearances of duplicity. There were now, therefore, two ministerial candidates, Sir Samuel Hood, and Mr. Sheridan—such is the wayward course of human events, and the singular circumstances which time brings about as the test of political sincerity.

In opposition to these, or rather to the latter, came forward a Mr. James Paull, who, having acquired some property by contracts in the East Indies, returned to England, for the purpose of bringing charges against the Marquis Wellesley, in which he had for some time the assistance both of Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan, till they began to suspect the man, or the truth of his allegations.

Mr. Paull then fell into the hands of Horne Tooke, Cobbett, and some other demagogues of a similar complexion, who, finding how fit he was on all accounts for their purposes, made him a convenient tool on this occasion, and abandoned him after the election, which completed his ruin, and drove him to a suicide. The election began on Monday, the third of November, when Mr. Sheridan was proposed by Mr. Peter Moore, amidst such a violent clamour, that it was impossible to collect what he said. The purport of his speech, however, was complimentary to the political principles of his friend, whose acceptance of



a place under government was, he said, honourable to his character; for as the business of the country must be done, it was better that it should be done by the friends of the people than by others.

Mr. Sheridan then presented himself on the hustings; but the clamours of the mob increased at his appearance. After stating his pretensions, he said that he wished to know whether the people wanted a riot, or an election. If their cause was a good one, their conduct ought to be peaceful: they should trust to that, and not to noise and outrage.

When Sir Samuel Hood was put in nomination, a dreadful uproar ensued; but when Sir Francis Burdett came forward to propose his friend, Mr. Paull, on strong constitutional grounds, he was received with the greatest acclamations. At the conclusion of his speech the baronet made use of this extraordinary language: "One hundred mercenaries in the House of Commons are much more dangerous to your liberties than five hundred thousand mercenaries in military array, headed by Buonaparte."

After he had ended in the usual manner, Mr. Sheridan, repeating what had just fallen from Sir Francis, demanded of him whether he ever knew him to be one of those mercenaries. "I put this question to Sir Francis Burdett," added he, emphatically. "Does he agree to answer me? Does

he mean to say, that for the sake of obtaining a place I would be one of those mercenaries? Another question too—Will Sir Francis, as a man of honour and truth, deny that I was the single man who stood by him upon the question of the prisons? Did I not second him in the motion for that enquiry?" Then, turning to the crowd, Mr. Sheridan said: "If you elect me, you will elect the man who is warmly attached to your interests, and who will never become the instrument of bartering away your rights."

At the close of the day the riotous proceedings were carried to a most scandalous excess; and such was the ungovernable fury of the populace, that personal violence was committed against Mr. Sheridan, particularly by one ruffian, a butcher, who struck him on the back with a marrow-bone, and attempted another blow, but was prevented, and taken into custody. The next day a handbill was circulated, signed by an eminent physician, stating, that, in consequence of the ill usage which the right honourable candidate had met with the preceding day, he was seriously indisposed, and could not make his appearance on the hustings. After this, till the final close of the poll on the nineteenth, when Sir Samuel Hood and Mr. Sheridan were declared duly elected, the city of Westminster, and the whole metropolis, was in a state of confusion, from the fierceness of the contention, and the activity displayed by the

partizans on each side. The customary ceremony of parading the public streets being gone through, the successful candidates and their friends dined together at the Thatched House Tavern, where Lord William Russell presided. Of the commonplace eloquence which distinguishes such entertainments it is needless to take any notice; but Mr. Sheridan was rather unfortunate in his choice of a topic, when he said, that, of all the frailties which prejudice or ignorance might ascribe to him, ingratitude was a vice which had never been imputed to him, and which, he hoped, he never should deserve.

This, in a moral and private sense, perhaps, was true, but politically it was far from being correct; for there unluckily existed at that time a strong charge against him at Stafford, to the people of which borough he had just before professed an unalterable attachment, and declared that nothing would separate him from their service. His attempt to redeem this pledge, by sending down his son as a candidate, was not very likely to ingratiate their esteem; and the reception which the young gentleman met with at that place, where he could muster only one hundred and sixty-five votes, with all his manœuvres and influence, afforded a striking proof of the public feeling. Even the successful termination of the contest in Westminster was far enough from being a proof of the popularity of Mr. Sheridan; and had any man

of character and talent, with a corresponding degree of interest, stood in competition with him, the issue would, beyond doubt, have been very different. Paull was a man of obscure origin, and contemptible in every respect; yet, by his perseverance, he contrived to give the united candidates great trouble; and for some time the decision appeared very doubtful, requiring the utmost exertions of a powerful party, together with the weight of government influence and parochial associations, to turn the scale in favour of Mr. Sheridan. So ridiculous, indeed, were the fears of some persons of rank, and such was the sensibility of political feeling on this occasion, that when a subscription was entered into for the purpose of defraying the expenses of Mr. Sheridan, the late Duke of Queensbury sent to the committee a draft for one thousand pounds upon his bankers. The business, however, did not end even here; for when the high bailiff refused a scrutiny, Paull was so infatuated, or misled, as to petition against the return of Mr. Sheridan, on the ground of bribery and corruption; but his allegations failed of proof, though many extraordinary circumstances came out in evidence before the committee of the House of Commons, which were neither creditable to the witnesses, nor their employers.

Mr. Sheridan was also accused of having acted a very deceitful part towards Lord Percy, and attempting to supplant him privately, while he



affected to give him his support. One incident at the last election seemed to countenance this report, and that was the declaration of Dennis O'Brien, that there were thousands in Westminster who would sooner vote for the Duke of Northumberland's porter than give their support to a man of probity and talent like Mr. Sheridan. Now, as this very Mr. O'Brien had a few weeks before discountenanced the attempt made in favour of Mr. Sheridan, and paid his own court at Northumberland House, by proposing Lord Percy as the fittest person to succeed Mr. Fox, the impudence of his language, to say nothing of his inconsistency, could not fail to disgust every liberal mind. Mr. Whitbread was somewhat alarmed for the interests and character of Mr. Sheridan, whose agent O'Brien now was; and therefore he recommended him to take some public notice of the remark in the way of censure, and to free himself from the imputation which it was calculated to produce. Instead, however, of acting according to this judicious counsel, Mr. Sheridan threw out some sarcasms upon the occasion, and drily observed, that, "to be sure, his friend O'Brien was wrong and intemperate, as far as related to the Duke of Northumberland's porter; though he had no doubt but there were thousands in Westminster who would give the preference to Mr. Whitbread's PORTER."

## CHAPTER XXXV.

*Change of Administration.—Sarcasm of Mr. Sheridan on his Colleagues.—New Election for Westminster.—Low Humour of Mr. Sheridan.—His Vindication of the Character of Mr. Fox.—Termination of the Contest.—Failure of Mr. Thomas Sheridan at Stafford.—The Father secures a Seat for Ilchester.—Generosity of the Prince.—Mr. Sheridan differs from his Friends on the State of Ireland.—His Opposition to Ministers on the Expedition to Copenhagen.—His patriotic Conduct on the Affairs of Spain.—Erroneous view of India and the Government of the Marquis Wellesley.*

MR. SHERIDAN had scarcely secured his seat, after struggling with a vexatious election and petition, than he was driven again into the field of contention, to cope with new competitors, and under more formidable disadvantages. The administration to which he belonged having attempted to entrap their sovereign into an obnoxious measure by an artifice, received a sudden call to surrender their places; and this was almost immediately followed by an appeal to the people in a dissolution of parliament. It merits observation, however, that whatever might have been the sentiments of Mr. Sheridan on the main question of the Catholic claims, or emancipation, according to the phraseology of party, he certainly disapproved

of the conduct of his political associates and leaders in this particular instance; for though he had to go out with the rest, he did it by compulsion, and with no cordial good will towards his companions, saying, in his old spirit of humour, that he had often heard of men running their heads against a wall to knock their brains out; but he never knew persons so stupid as to build a wall for that purpose.

The city of Westminster again became the scene of riot and animosity, which raged with additional fury, as the flames of the former contentions were not extinguished when the change of ministers gave new fuel to the passions of the populace. No less than five candidates were put in nomination; Sir Francis Burdett, Lord Cochrane, Mr. Elliott the brewer, Mr. Sheridan, and his late antagonist, Mr. Paull, who was now forsaken by those who originally brought him into the field, and who then cried him up as a man of independent principles, and deserving of general support. It was evident, from the beginning, that the chances were numerous against Mr. Sheridan, yet he maintained his ground with great firmness, and amused the auditories before the hustings, daily, by the sallies of his wit, and the uniform suavity of his temper, amidst the coarse ribaldry with which he was continually assailed, and the reflections that were occasionally thrown out upon his political connexions and private con-

duct. The narrative of the skirmishings, and the reports of the speeches which occur in those saturnalian seasons, when the people, to use the language of our greatest poet, "bawl for freedom in their senseless mood," may be amusing enough at the time, but afford nothing worthy of record, except it be to shew the extent of human folly, and the pains which even sensible men take to impose upon their own understandings. The addresses of Mr. Sheridan, during this last conflict for the honour of representing Westminster, were not such as did credit to his genius or his patriotism. He told the motley crew, that now he came recommended to them in a new character, having been fortunately deprived of the office which on a former occasion was urged as an objection to his pretensions. All that he had gained by his appointment, he said, was the consolation of being twelve hundred pounds poorer than he was before he enjoyed it. After amusing the rabble in this puerile manner, he said that all his life he had preferred short parliaments, and therefore, of course, he could have no reason to complain of their frequency of late, except, that as parliament formerly chose its ministers, now ministers had got the trick of choosing their parliaments.

Lower than this, it was hardly possible for any man of ordinary intellect to descend; and yet the orator sunk even below this, when he became the



panegyrist of his own son, and exclaimed: "May I only be known as the father of Thomas Sheridan!" He acted with much more discernment and dignity, when, in a manly spirit of indignation, he rescued the name of Mr. Fox from the foul aspersions which had been thrown upon that distinguished character by Lord Cochrane. Though his zeal in this instance gave an air of extravagance to the praise which he bestowed, it did honour to his feelings, and was well calculated to make a favourable impression upon his auditors. "When Mr. Fox ceased to live," Mr. Sheridan said, "he was persuaded that the cause of private honour and friendship lost its highest glory; public liberty lost its most undaunted champion, and general humanity its most active and ardent assertor. Perhaps no man," he observed, "had ever lived so eminently distinguished for those qualities both of the head and the heart, which serve to conciliate regard and to command respect. In him was united the most amiable disposition with the most firm and resolute spirit; the mildest manners with the most exalted mind. With regard to that great man, it might indeed be well said, that in him the bravest heart and the most enlarged mind sat enthroned upon the seat of gentleness."

At the close of the election, which terminated in favour of Sir Francis Burdett and Lord Cochrane, Mr. Sheridan signified his intention of petitioning

against the return of the latter ; but this design, if he ever formed it in reality, he did not think proper afterwards to carry into effect.

Thus ended his last electioneering campaign for Westminster, which was rendered more mortifying by the treatment given to his son at Stafford, where the burgesses, on hearing of his approach, went out to meet him, and having taken the horses from the carriage, drew it in a direction towards London, and then wished the candidate a safe journey back to his father, who met him returning, at Oxford, like the knight of the rueful countenance. Private interest, however, secured Mr. Sheridan a seat in this parliament, being returned with his old friend, Mr. Michael Angelo Taylor, for the Borough of Ilchester, while the contest was carrying on in Westminster.

From this period, the powers and the popularity of the orator declined rapidly ; and it was observed at the opening of the session that he did not enter into the senatorial warfare with that warmth which might have been expected. For this, indeed, there were ample reasons, as, besides his own difference of opinion with his late colleagues on the matter which brought about their disgrace, he perhaps deemed it prudent to preserve silence out of respect to the prince, who was far from being displeased with the removal of the ex-ministers, whatever partiality he might have for some of them as individuals. Mr. Sheridan, in particular, experi-

enced on this occasion the most striking proof of the attachment of his royal highness, who, knowing that he must be put to considerable inconvenience by being obliged to remove from the official residence which he held as treasurer of the navy, made him a present of the Red House, as it is called, adjoining the palace in Pall Mall, together with the whole of the elegant furniture.

Mr. Sheridan being again in opposition to government, distinguished himself by the resistance which he made to the measures brought forward, with the concurrence of Mr. Grattan, for the security of Ireland. It was admitted on all hands that a spirit of insurrection pervaded that island; and even the most zealous opponents of ministers could not deny the existence of an unprincipled faction there, who were eager to throw the country under the protection of France. Acts of outrage were frequent, and the intrigues of the French party were carried on without any disguise, as if the dissolution of the union with England had been certain, and the alliance with the great empire equally stable and salutary. Mr. Sheridan, however, whose patriotism had on some occasions induced him to sacrifice all private considerations and resentments for the general welfare, now ridiculed any idea of danger from the influence of France in Ireland, though the correspondence between the disaffected there, and the traitors in exile, proved the fact beyond all question. The precautionary steps taken

to guard against another rebellion were reprobated by Mr. Sheridan with great asperity, even while the Irish members, who were best acquainted with the state of the country, and the necessity of the case, gave their decided approbation to these preventive measures. In opposition to their judgment, the English orator endeavoured to paralyze the hands of the executive government at this eventful crisis, by bringing on a motion, pledging the house to enter upon an enquiry into the state of Ireland early in the ensuing session of parliament, for the purpose of adopting remedies to allay the discontents which were alleged to exist in that country. This proposition he introduced in a long and declamatory speech, throughout which he assigned no other reason for the course so strenuously recommended by him than that which actually demonstrated the propriety of its rejection, for the delay which he sought would have rendered enquiry useless, and a remedy impossible. It was out of the power of eloquence to disprove facts that glared in the face of day; and even the ingenuity of Mr. Sheridan could not persuade the house that the way to cure a fever in the political body was by instituting a distant investigation into its causes. One part of his desultory speech on this subject was curious, as descriptive of Buonaparte, who, he said, was surrounding France, not with the iron frontier which distinguished the childish ambition of Louis the Fourteenth, but with



kingdoms of his own creation ; securing the gratitude of higher minds as the hostage, and the fears of others as the pledges of his safety. His were no ordinary fortifications. His martello towers were thrones ; sceptres tipt with crowns were the palli-sadoes of his entrenchments ; and kings were his sentinels.

But though Mr. Sheridan had long before exhibited a correct estimate of the character of the Corsican adventurer ; and though on particular occasions he raised his voice loudly to rouse the national energies against the unprincipled ambition of this military despot, he fell into a strange inconsistency, when in his zeal against ministers, on account of the attack upon Copenhagen, he presumed to say that Buonaparte had better grounds of defence for the murder of the Duke D'Enghein than England had for her conduct towards Denmark. Now, he knew very well, when he made this imprudent observation, that to accomplish the destruction or subjugation of England, the usurper, who then tyrannized over half of the European continent, had brought his plans so nearly to bear, that nothing was wanting to complete them but the key of the Baltic, and the entire dominion of the Mediterranean. For the first of these objects he had already made sufficient preparations by his command of Hamburgh, and his influence over Denmark. At this crisis, therefore, it became an imperative obligation on the British ministers to

counteract his designs, by getting possession of Zealand and the fleet at Copenhagen. In this they succeeded, and by so doing, an incalculable train of evils on that side was destroyed in the bud. Yet there were public men in this country, calling themselves politicians, who could bitterly reproach their own government, as having acted out of a wanton spirit of cruelty and injustice in preventing the ruin of the country, and wresting the north of Europe from the grasp of the destroyer. But while the madness of party was thus unintentionally aiding the views of a capricious upstart, that power which converts the devices of the crafty into snares for their own confusion, and brings upon the wicked the misery which they had prepared for others, was about to give a visible demonstration of the immutable truth, that contempt is the boundary of lawless ambition, and ignorance the limit of intellectual presumption. Foiled on one side, Buonaparte formed the desperate resolution of seizing the whole Southern Peninsula, and thus, by incorporating Spain and Portugal with the great empire, gain the entire riches of South America; and by annihilating at once the commercial consequence of England, become the master of the world. Considering what had been achieved in Italy, in Germany, and in Holland, there certainly appeared little if any obstacle to the completion of his vast project of annexing the two weakest of the remaining powers on the continent to his sceptre.

But his scheme was thwarted by circumstances that mortified his pride; and he found, that after circumventing the imbecile councils of an impotent government, he had to encounter the unconquerable will of an exasperated people. The flame of patriotism which burst forth in Spain displayed in glowing colours the wretched infatuation of those who had either been cajoled into slavery, by trusting to the promises of the tyrant, or were cowed into submission by their fears of his power. Never, in fact, was a more complete triumph gained over the confidence of political opinion than in this instance; when the Spanish nation sought the aid of England, with whom she was at war, against the murderous embraces of her pretended ally and treacherous protector.

Again, the good sense and liberality of Mr. Sheridan prevailed over the trammels and prejudices of party, and he seized an early opportunity of hailing the light that had sprung up in the south of Europe, as an encouraging appearance of which due advantage should instantly be taken. He accordingly gave notice of a motion on the affairs of Spain, and persisted in bringing it on, in opposition to the sentiments of his associates, who were either less sanguine in regard to the success of the Spanish patriots, or inclined to look more favourably upon the designs of the oppressor.

The speech of Mr. Sheridan was extremely animated, but it was better than declamatory, for it



exhibited a just, straightforward, and enlarged field of policy. "Let Spain see," said he, "that we are not inclined to stint the services we had it in our power to render her; that we were not actuated by the desire of any petty advantage to ourselves; but that our exertions were to be solely directed to the attainment of the grand and general object, the emancipation of the world. But let not our assistance be given in driblets; let it not be romantically and foolishly bestowed; let it be seen that the enthusiasm of the people had been fairly awakened; for without that our efforts could avail nothing. But if the flame were once fairly caught, our success was certain. France would then find that she had been hitherto contending only against principalities, powers, and authorities; but that she had now to contend against a people." Mr. Sheridan concluded by observing, emphatically, "that the crisis was the most important that could be conceived, and that the stand made in the Asturias was the most glorious. He hoped that the progress of it would be closely watched, and that not a single opportunity would be lost of adding vigour and energy to the spirit which existed there. The symptoms could not be long in shewing themselves; their progress must be rapid; probably, the very next despatch might be sufficient on which to form a decisive opinion; but if the flame did not burn like wildfire, it was all over. He hoped ministers would act as circumstances required; and



if so, they should receive his cordial support." Having delivered this exhortation, he moved for a variety of papers relative to the subject; but at the suggestion of ministers, the motion was withdrawn. One circumstance connected with this speech was remarkable, and deserves particular observation. After Mr. Sheridan had given notice of his intention to bring the state of Spain under consideration, the deputies from that country arrived, and were invited to dine with Mr. Canning on the very evening when the discussion was to take place in the House of Commons. The secretary of state could not with propriety be absent from his parliamentary duty, and Mr. Sheridan would not consent to put off his motion. The consequence was that Sir Arthur Wellesley, at the request of Mr. Canning, did the honours of his table on the occasion; and it may be supposed that the conversation was extremely interesting to all parties. Mr. Sheridan, in the early part of his speech, alluding to this incident, dropped a hint with respect to the satisfaction which the noble foreigners would enjoy in the company of the gallant officer, who might perhaps be employed to represent his country in fighting the battles of Spain. Within two months after this the victory of Vimiera was gained; and the wonderful chain of events that followed in rapid succession is recorded in the gratitude of millions, and will prove an eternal example of the sovereignty of providence over the councils of men.

Another subject to which Mr. Sheridan directed his attention, at the close of this session of parliament, was the state of India, and the changes which had taken place there under the administration of the Marquis Wellesley. Here, however, it was evident that the rhetorical powers of the orator were more comprehensive than his knowledge, and that he could declaim with great effect upon circumstances with the real nature and policy of which he was imperfectly acquainted. Of this a more striking instance could not be adduced than the distorted view which he gave of the government of the noble marquis, who had, he said, found India in a great and increasing state of prosperity; possessed of a system of equity and economy admirably calculated for the solidity of our establishment in that country; but that when he quitted it, he left behind him an example of the most pernicious prodigality and profuseness: when he went there, the native powers placed the utmost confidence in the faith of the British government; but he left them entertaining sentiments of disgust and enmity, on account of its treachery and oppression. "In short," exclaimed the orator, "the result of the noble lord's administration was this, that when he went to India, he found Great Britain without a foe; and when he departed, he left Great Britain without a friend."

Such was the picture sketched by a lively fancy under the influence of prejudice; but the whole representation was in fact the reverse of the truth,

for never was the state of the British establishment in the east more insecure than at the very period when the noble lord, who was so grossly abused, entered upon the government. The affairs of the company were in a deteriorated condition, and the courts of the native princes were almost wholly under the influence of French officers, sent out with the view of organizing a force sufficient to destroy the English power in Hindoostan. But by the energy of those measures, which were characterized as prodigal, ambitious, and unjust, the combined Mahratta powers were subjugated, the peaceable states were strengthened, and foreign intrigues were confounded. Yet, for so fixing the British interests in that important and extensive region upon a foundation permanent and enlarged, was the Marquis Wellesley stigmatized by the malevolence of party, and even threatened with an impeachment.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

*Destruction of Drury Lane Theatre.—Fortitude of Mr. Sheridan.—His strange Conduct to the Performers.—Subscription for his Son.—Extraordinary Rumour of the Death of Mr. Sheridan.—Attempt to procure a Lottery for his theatrical Concerns.—Application for a third Theatre.—That Plan opposed by Mr. Sheridan, who pleads his own Cause at the Council Board.—The Design frustrated.—Act passed for the Incorporation of the Proprietors of Drury Lane.—Anecdote of the Duke of Norfolk.—Disputes between Mr. Sheridan and the Company.—Objection raised by the Lord Chamberlain.—Final Settlement of the Affairs of the Theatre.*

THE inhabitants of the metropolis, and of the country many miles round, were thrown into great alarm by a tremendous conflagration which broke out suddenly in Drury Lane Theatre, about eleven o'clock at night, on the twenty-fourth of February, 1809. In a few minutes the whole building exhibited a mass of fire; and within the space of an hour the devouring element had reduced this splendid edifice to a heap of ruins.

Mr. Sheridan was then in the House of Commons, where some of the members immediately, out of respect to him, proposed an adjournment; but though he was evidently much affected, he



said, in a low tone of voice, that he did not think the misfortune, however heavy it might be to himself, was of so much consequence that the proceedings of the legislature should be thereby suspended. Soon afterwards he left the house; and finding on his arrival at the spot all exertion useless, he was prevailed upon to retire to the Piazza Coffee House, where every attention was shewn him by several personages of the first distinction. His conduct on this occasion was cool and collected, and he displayed great fortitude in his remarks upon the event, observing that the misfortune was by no means an uncommon one, and might be remedied; but that he felt most from a consciousness that it was not in his power to save numbers from the inconveniences they must suffer by the want of employment, and who were in consequence threatened with inevitable ruin. His only consolation, he said, was in witnessing the attachment of his friends; and in the reflection that, as far as he had been able to ascertain, no lives were lost.

The accident was said to have arisen from the negligence of some workmen in leaving the remains of a fire in one of the stoves; though various surmises were spread about upon the occasion, and many stories were told, one of which was very remarkable. A short time preceding this calamity, part of St. James's Palace was burnt; and immediately afterwards, the Prince of Wales received

an anonymous letter, informing his royal highness that he would shortly hear of other public buildings being destroyed in the same manner. At that time the communication did not appear deserving of notice, but when the prince heard of what had happened at Drury Lane, he sent for Mr. Sheridan, and gave him the letter. The circumstance as a singularity was undoubtedly deserving of notice, and yet the coincidence must have been perfectly casual, since there was no reason to believe that the fire at the theatre was any other than accidental.

The total loss was estimated at three hundred thousand pounds, of which only thirty-five thousand pounds were insured; and that sum was instantly attached by the Duke of Bedford as the ground landlord. It was said that Mr. Sheridan, in addition to his public damage, lost two pianofortes, which had belonged to his first wife; a very valuable clock that had been the property of Garrick, and which was valued at seven hundred pounds; an organ that had once been Handel's, worth eight hundred pounds; and the whole of the elegant furniture, which, on the change of the ministry, was conveyed to the theatre from his residence in Somerset House.

Several meetings of the performers took place immediately after the fire, to determine upon their future conduct: nothing, however, was done till the first of March, when Mr. Sheridan relinquished

all control, and left them with his good wishes to adopt such a course as should be most to their advantage. They then entered into a treaty with the proprietor of the Opera House; and two pieces were accordingly announced for that theatre, when Mr. Sheridan unexpectedly changed his mind, and insisted upon having a share in the profits for himself and his son. This threw all into confusion; and the company came to the spirited resolution of acting as an independent body, under a license from the chamberlain; which design, however, was frustrated by Mr. Sheridan, who, being apprized of their intention, exerted his eloquence with such effect as to prevent the grant of a license from the chamberlain for some time; though afterwards, when his lordship was better informed on the subject, he gave his consent to the performance for three nights only, which proved very beneficial, as, in addition to the strength of the company, and the gratuitous use of the house, Madame Catalani voluntarily contributed her powers to the assistance of the fund. Subsequently, the performers obtained leave to play three nights more at the King's Theatre; but then they were obliged to divide the profits with the proprietor. From thence they removed to the Lyceum, where they acted occasionally, in opposition to Mr. Sheridan, who endeavoured to secure a portion of the receipts for himself and his son, for whose use a subscription, amounting to ten thousand pounds,

was raised about this time by several of the royal family and principal nobility, on account of his loss at the theatre, and to enable him to visit a warmer climate for his health.

At this period the town was suddenly surprised by a paragraph in some of the newspapers, giving an account of the death of the elder Mr. Sheridan, which melancholy notice was accompanied by a very laboured and pompous eulogium upon his various merits as a politician, poet, and manager. The very same evening, however, he made his appearance in the House of Commons, where his entrance excited no little mirth on the suddenness of his resuscitation. But Mr. Sheridan was less successful in his endeavours to revive the theatre, and he actually entertained thoughts, at one time, of disposing of the whole concern by a public lottery, upon which scheme he consulted the chancellor of the exchequer, who gave it his decided disapprobation.

In the mean time several persons of distinction formed the idea of erecting a third theatre in the metropolis, upon an improved plan, which gave such alarm to the holders of the old royal grants, that they spared no pains to counteract the project, though it was pretty confidently asserted that Mr. Sheridan had entered into a secret negociation with the speculators for the disposal to them of the dormant patent. When, however, it was found that this could not be acted upon, he joined with the



proprietors of his own and the other theatres in resisting the attempt to encroach upon theatrical monopoly. The petition in favour of the new institution presented to the privy council was met by separate ones from Mr. Sheridan, and the several persons interested in the old theatres. Mr. Sheridan also had an interview with the king at Windsor, upon the subject; but His Majesty, after hearing the whole of his story and complaint, very properly declined any interference in a business which was already under the consideration of the privy council. A controversy upon the subject was next carried on in the newspapers, between Mr. Sheridan as the defender of the existing monopoly, and those persons who were zealous for the rights of the public to an extension of dramatic amusement, subject only to legislative restrictions, and the license of the chamberlain. The design, however, went forwards, and the sixteenth of March, 1810, was appointed for the hearing of the applicants and their opponents before the council, where Mr. Sheridan appeared in his capacity as a member of the board, exhibiting the curious phenomenon of a judge acting the part of an advocate for his own claims. The counsel for the new theatrical incorporation founded their prayer upon the assumption that the original patents were become nugatory, and that the increasing population of the metropolis rendered a third theatre absolutely necessary; particularly as the magnitude of Covent

Garden and Drury Lane, according to their recent state, and in which they were intended to be renewed, defeated the original intention of scenic representation. On the second day of hearing Mr. Sheridan addressed the court, where he sat in his judicial character, and expatiated at considerable length upon the exclusive right possessed by the old theatres under their patents, and for which large sums had been expended; though at the same time, he said, that he should not attempt to justify the principle of monopoly in the abstract, which, in fact, was the very point then at issue.

But even this inconsistency was trifling when compared with the extraordinary argument advanced by Mr. Sheridan, both in his petition and in his speech, that if a third theatre was actually wanted, the license or grant for the erection of it should be given to himself and the other proprietors of Drury Lane, as the holders of an obsolete patent, of which every pecuniary advantage had, in fact, already been made. The eloquence, or interest, however, of Mr. Sheridan so far prevailed as to cause the rejection of the application; but while the affair was in agitation before the privy council, an attempt was made to carry the same object through parliament, on a petition presented by Sir James Shaw, then Lord Mayor. Mr. Sheridan here also exerted himself with indefatigable diligence, and complained very bitterly, but with rather a ludicrous effect, of the unfair arts that

were resorted to for the injury of his patent rights, which, it was confidently said, he had at that very time offered to barter with the same committee for a leading share in the projected establishment.

This scheme of a new theatre, however, though supported by the principal people in the city of London, experienced such resistance, openly and secretly, as to prove abortive; and Mr. Sheridan succeeded in carrying a bill through both houses for the erection of Drury Lane theatre by a subscription, and for the incorporation of the proprietors. When this bill passed the House of Lords, the scene is said to have had a very whimsical appearance; for while Mr. Sheridan stood behind the chancellor endeavouring by his gestures to gain friends to his cause, the Duke of Norfolk, most probably in mischievous sport, contrived to throw him into a fright, by expressing a wish that the patents, upon which so much was said, should be brought up and laid on the table.

During these proceedings for the security of the property, serious disputes arose between Mr. Sheridan and the performers, who denied that he had any power or authority over them at the Lyceum, where he, on the contrary, presumed to interfere as the manager, and to claim part of the fruits of their labours. Upon this, the company presented a petition to His Majesty, stating the nature of their situation, the reasons of their dispersion, and the hardships to which they were exposed by the

conduct of Mr. Sheridan, who, on his part, inserted a letter in the *Morning Chronicle*, under the signature of *FACT*, in which he denied the truth of the allegations advanced by the performers, and observed farther, that the exposition which they had threatened to publish would be nothing but a tissue of calumny and falsehood. The complainants, on the other hand, were not to be deterred by this singular method of refutation, but published their declaration, signed by the most respectable members of the company, who asserted roundly that there was not a syllable of truth in all that *FACT* had uttered. This squabble had scarcely terminated before Mr. Sheridan found himself involved in another dilemma, by a communication from the Earl of Dartmouth, disputing the legality of the dormant or Killigrew's patent, and declaring that he should oppose the building of a new theatre in Westminster, unless that authority was relinquished. As this would have been fatal to the restoration of the theatre, a negotiation was entered into with the chamberlain, and after some delay, it was settled that the patent in question should not be acted upon, and that the remaining one should be so arranged as to continue in force for twenty-one years longer. This obstacle being removed, it was now naturally to have expected that the new edifice would have proceeded without any impediment; but this was not the case, owing to the want of public confidence, and the con-



flicting interests that were yet to be reconciled : and it was not till the seventeenth of October in the following year that the final arrangements of the committee were completed, and the result presented by Mr. Whitbread to the Prince Regent for his approbation. By this report, it appeared that the sum of four hundred thousand pounds, requisite for the building, had been actually subscribed ; that out of it, forty thousand pounds were assigned for the purchase of the old patent interest, half of which sum was to be paid to Mr. Sheridan, who thereby relinquished all claims upon the concern ; and the other moiety was to be divided into equal shares, between Mrs. Linley, Mrs. Richardson, and Mr. Thomas Sheridan. By this settlement it was also determined that the old renters should be allowed twenty-five per cent. in full of all their demands : and it ought to be observed, that on this occasion his Grace of Bedford very generously relinquished all his claims for arrears of rent due from the concern.

Thus terminated the theatrical history of Mr. Sheridan, whose conduct, both as proprietor and manager, neither sophistry can justify nor charity excuse ; for while he always appeared on the alert to profit by the advantage which he possessed, he never paid the slightest attention to the economy of the establishment, nor took any pains to uphold its credit. His talents were exerted only to exhaust the resources of the theatre for his private

purposes, and to persuade the inconsiderate to embark their capital in purchasing shares of a fictitious property. During the period when he had the control of the business, every thing went rapidly to disorder: the rehearsals were neglected; all the servants of the house were left at perfect liberty; tradesmens' bills were unpaid; and the public was completely disgusted. The whole establishment, in short, exhibited nothing but disorganization; and yet, though the cause was apparent to all the world, Mr. Sheridan, in his petition to the king in council, alleged as one ground on which he claimed indulgence for his losses in the theatre, that "the necessary economy did not prevail in the management." But, in fact, if he was injured by the irregularities which pervaded the concern, the fault was all his own; and the other proprietors, with the numerous creditors, had reason to complain, that while they were continually suffering by his imprudence, he was deriving benefit from the real capital which they had advanced. It is observable also, that amidst all his carelessness about the state of the theatre, he was not unmindful of his own individual interests; for, besides overvaluing his share, and that of his son, Mr. Sheridan contrived to reserve to himself six hundred a-year out of the fruit-office, for which, with the reversion of boxes as his property, he demanded at the winding up of the concern no less than four thousand pounds; but the claim was

disallowed. An attempt was likewise made in one stage of the business to induce the creditors to take five shillings in the pound in lieu of their demands, while the proprietors were to be allowed nine shillings in the pound on an imaginary capital.

It is but justice, however, to remark, that when the bill for the final adjustment of the affairs of Drury Lane was in progress through the House of Commons, it was stated on the behalf of Mr. Sheridan that he had evinced great disinterestedness in giving up his private rights to public claims, and that he would have gone still further, if the committee had not laid some restraint upon his concessions. Well would it have been both for himself and all the parties connected with him, had he displayed an equal portion of feeling at an earlier period, and exerted both his talents and his spirit in improving a concern, which, by his negligence and extravagance, was suffered to go rapidly into a state of remediless disorder.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

*Parliamentary History of Mr. Sheridan resumed.—His Motion respecting the Exclusion of Strangers from the House of Commons.—Observations on the Publication of the Debates.—Petition against the Resolution of the Society of Lincoln's Inn.—Installation of Lord Grenville as Chancellor of Oxford.—Reception of Mr. Sheridan in the University.—Disappointed of a Degree both there and at Cambridge.—Celebration of the Birth-Day of the Prince of Wales.—Speech of Mr. Sheridan.—He draws up an Inscription for the Monument of Lord Nelson.—Illness of the King.—Proceedings in Parliament on the Regency.—Disappointment of the Opposition.—Opinion of Mr. Sheridan on Specie and a Paper Currency.*

THE parliamentary history of Mr. Sheridan suffered a considerable suspension in consequence of the fire at Drury Lane, and the subsequent proceedings attending that complicated concern. From the evening when the conflagration took place, to the sixth of February in the following year, his name never occurs in the votes; but on that day he brought forward, without success, a motion respecting the standing order of the House of Commons, excluding strangers from the gallery. In moving for a committee of privileges to consider this subject, his intention appears to have been



that of modifying the rule so as to maintain the rights and usages of parliament on the one hand, while the public should be accommodated with hearing the debates on the other. On this occasion Mr. Sheridan delivered a long and desultory speech, in which he made good use of the political writings of Swift, whose language the reader will recognize in the following passages: "Give me but the liberty of the press, and I will give to the minister a venal House of Peers. I will give him a servile and corrupt House of Commons. I will give him the full swing of patronage and office. I will give him the whole host of ministerial influence. I will give him all the power that place can confer upon him, to purchase up submission and overawe resistance; and yet, armed with the liberty of the press, I will go forth to meet him undismayed. I will attack the mighty fabric he has reared with that mightier engine. I will shake down corruption from its height, and bury it beneath the ruins of those abuses it was meant to shelter."

It was, however, rightly judged, that the restriction which the motion tended ultimately to abrogate was necessary for the public security, since occasions may possibly arise when the disclosure of the deliberations of parliament would be alike injurious to the government and the general welfare. How, indeed, the liberty of the press is affected by such a restraint it would be no

easy matter to shew, unless it can be proved that the connivance, which of late years has grown almost into prescription, is an original right coeval with the system of representation. On the other hand, nothing is more obvious than the mischief arising from the constant publication of all the speeches which are made in the two houses every session; as hereby the public mind is agitated, discontent is inflamed, and the proceedings of government are not only retarded, but speedily made known to those foreign powers who have an interest in counteracting them. In the time of peace, these reports serve for little other purpose than that of gratifying idle curiosity, creating a refractory spirit, giving advantage to the designing, and imposing upon the weak, who are easily led astray by empty declamation and clamorous abuse, vented under the pretext of exposing corruption, and asserting the injured rights of the people. But the evil arising from this license during war is infinitely greater, because, in addition to the embarrassments which it occasions by being an engine in the hands of faction to disturb the internal tranquillity, it becomes subservient in a variety of ways to the designs and operations of the enemy; while, at the same time, it lessens the confidence of friendly states, whose alliance may be of the greatest moment, but who must naturally feel disgusted on finding their character, policy, and connexions made the subject of abuse by every noisy

and ignorant declaimer, for the sake of gaining a little ephemeral popularity at the expense of his country.

Mr. Sheridan, soon after the failure of his attempt to regulate the standing orders of the House of Commons for the exclusion of strangers, evinced his zeal in defending the freedom of the press from what was conceived to be an attack made upon it by the benchers of Lincoln's Inn, who had refused to admit a person as student of law, on account of his being employed in the capacity of reporter to a newspaper. This rejection was grounded on a bye-law of the society, that no person who had written for hire in the public journals should be entered upon their books, with a view of being called to the bar. That this learned body had the right to make such a resolution, seems unquestionable, since there is no more in it than that of refusing admission to persons who have practised as attorneys within a limited period. The proscribed party, however, put a petition into the hands of Mr. Sheridan, stating the hardship which he had sustained; and his case was dwelt upon with great eloquence by the able advocate who undertook to exhibit his complaint. Mr. Stephen also, now one of the masters in chancery, displayed considerable feeling and no small portion of candour on the same occasion, by observing that he had himself in early life been so employed; nor did he consider the situation of

reporter or journalist as derogatory to the legal profession. After some animated conversation, in which the general sentiment appeared to be against the interdict, the business ended in an understanding that the obnoxious bye-law should be rescinded.

The death of the Duke of Portland having occasioned a vacancy in the chancellorship of Oxford, a sharp contest ensued between Lord Grenville and Lord Eldon, each of whom had a powerful interest in the university; but by the exertions of Christ Church and Brasenose colleges the former prevailed, and the installation, which took place at the beginning of July, was distinguished for the magnificence of the ceremony, and the assemblage of learning and fashion with which it was attended. Among the visitors was Mr. Sheridan, who experienced the most flattering reception, particularly from the junior members of the university, every time that he made his appearance in the theatre. His name, however, was not upon the list of honorary graduates; and this omission gave great offence to many of the spectators, who expressed their displeasure, not only by loud vociferations during the public exercises, but by circulating the following hand-bill about the different colleges: "It is humbly asked of the justice and generosity of the members of convocation, whether the public merits of the Right Honourable Richard Brinsley Sheridan do



not claim, upon the present occasion, the usual honorary mark of their respect; and whether it be consistent with the spirit of their honours to withhold them from a man whose talents have, through a long and arduous career, eminently adorned, and whose patriotism has, upon every trying occasion, stood forward to support the general interest of his country?"

This piece of empiricism, in whatever quarter it originated, was far enough from being calculated to make any impression in favour of the object of such extravagant puffing; and though Mr. Sheridan received the distinction due to his talents, both in convocation and at the table of the vice-chancellor, the pomp of the installation passed away without enrolling his name among the doctors of that ancient seat of the muses. It was, however, extremely disgusting to observe what pains were taken in some of the daily papers to blazon the particular attentions that were paid to him at Oxford, and to set forth the public indignation expressed in the university, on account of the omission of his name in the list of honorary academics. And yet, notwithstanding all this resentment, the same journals, by a strange inconsistency, endeavoured to make the world believe that the whole proceeded from the philosophic forbearance of the great man himself, who, according to them, modestly declined the proffered distinction.

Now it happened that, within twelve months after this, Mr. Sheridan went down to witness the installation of the Duke of Gloucester, at Cambridge, where he sat in the senate among the doctors waiting for a degree, which one of his most zealous friends thought he could secure: but here also, as at the sister university, he was unaccountably disappointed, which some of his admirers attributed, without reason, to methodistical influence.

On the thirteenth of August, this year, the birth-day of the Prince of Wales was celebrated at Brighton with great splendour; and nearly two hundred persons, among whom was Mr. Sheridan, sat down to dinner with his royal highness and his brothers. A ball and supper followed; after which, when the princes had retired, the health of Mr. Sheridan was drank with expressions indicating the general expectation of a speech, on which the orator arose; and after some complimentary language, observed, that though many might equal, he was proud to say none had a higher esteem or veneration for his royal highness than himself. He felt happy, he added, in declaring that he had long been honoured with the notice and condescension of the prince; and it was to the casualty of his being in the number of the invited guests upon this occasion that he attributed the distinction he had just received. His political conduct, Mr. Sheridan said, had ever been to sup-

port the liberties of Englishmen, and to oppose THAT MAN (Buonaparte), who warred not with this country alone, but with the whole human race. He was proud in stating that the prince had ever condescendingly noticed him with his kindest attentions; and happy was he to see young men rising up around him equally anxious, and equally likely to share in such distinctions, to whom he could say that all who knew the prince must love him, and that those who knew him best would love him most.

Another flattering mark of respect paid to Mr. Sheridan about this time was in his being selected by the corporation of London to draw up an inscription for the monument then erecting in Guildhall, to the memory of Lord Nelson. An elegant entertainment was given by the Lord Mayor and committee on the occasion, at which the composition certainly received much more applause than it merited.

Shortly after this the nation was thrown into confusion by the alarming accounts of the state of His Majesty's health, which rendering him incapable of performing any of the ordinary acts of government, obliged parliament to meet on the first of November, the day fixed by the last proclamation. As, of course, no farther prorogation could take place, the Speaker took the chair, and on the motion of the chancellor of the exchequer, the house adjourned for a fortnight, when

a farther adjournment was proposed for a like period, which was resisted by the rest of the opposition members, but supported by Mr. Sheridan, who divided with the majority.

On the seventeenth of December the house again assembled, and proceeded to examine the physicians, when Mr. Sheridan took the opportunity of complimenting ministers for the fairness of their conduct in this exigency; after which, he strongly recommended the adoption of the mode pursued upon a former occasion by the Irish legislature, of voting the regency at once to the Prince of Wales, by an address, praying his royal highness to assume the reins of government, subject to parliamentary security for the restoration of His Majesty's rights, as soon as his health should permit. Mr. Sheridan endeavoured to justify this concise method of proceeding by the precedent of the revolution; and affirmed that it was the only course to be taken for the preservation of unanimity, and the security of the sovereign power in all its dignity. This was, in fact, going over the old ground that had been so much and so unconstitutionally trodden by Mr. Fox and his adherents, when, for the sake of getting into office, they affected to see no difference between an hereditary monarchy and a provisional regency; and when they presumed to claim for the prince the same right to the one which he undoubtedly possessed to the other. Into the merits of this ques-



tion, however, it is needless here to enter; but the absurdity of quoting the Irish proceedings as an example worthy to be followed could only be equalled by the reference made to the revolution, at which period the throne was to all intents and purposes vacant. Yet Mr. Sheridan persisted in urging the claim of the prince to an unlimited regency with the same vehemence as had characterized his party when the business came before parliament for the first time, and when the principle was established, from which it would now have been unconstitutional and inexpedient to have departed. The regency, on the present occasion, was, therefore, modelled upon that basis; and it redounds to the honour of the illustrious personage, in whose hands the important charge was placed, that throughout the deliberations he never endeavoured to bias the minds of those members who might have been supposed to carry some weight in the two houses. When the settlement was completed, his royal highness, in a tender regard to the feelings of his venerable parent, thought it an act of indispensable duty to continue those ministers in office who had enjoyed and merited his confidence. This equitable determination, which did so much credit to the liberality and delicacy of the prince, gave umbrage to the party who had been so zealous in advocating his fictitious rights; and many of them now openly inveighed against him for having renounced

his old friends and political connexions; forgetting in the effervescence of their disappointed hopes that by this resentment they destroyed their own plea of disinterestedness, and admitted that their attachment was any thing but sincere affection or genuine patriotism. Of all the ministers, Mr. Perceval was the principal object of their enmity and contumely. In the house he was assailed with extreme virulence; and out of it the basest arts were employed to poison the royal mind against his character. These attempts to injure that exemplary man were so far successful as to produce a distance in the treatment of him for some time; but within six months after the arrangement of the regency, that reserve was softened into kindness, and settled finally into confidence, much to the mortification of those who had endeavoured by various means to render his situation unpleasant for the purpose of driving him to a resignation.

But though the final settlement of this great national concern disappointed the expectations of the opposition, who called themselves the friends of the prince, the influence of Mr. Sheridan at Carleton House continued with unabated credit, and his judgment was consulted on most occasions of public pomp and festivity. When the prince received the parliamentary deputation on his entrance upon the sovereignty, Mr. Sheridan took a part in the splendid forms of the court;

and at the first levee held by his royal highness the management of the procession was committed entirely to his direction, for which he was honoured the same evening at dinner with the public approbation of the prince and his brothers.

It merits observation in this place, because it shews the discernment of Mr. Sheridan upon a subject which deceived many able men, that he steadily opposed all the fanciful speculations which, about this time, were generally broached respecting the depreciation of bank notes in consequence of the high price of bullion. He took a very comprehensive view of the question, and combated with considerable ingenuity the arguments of those who maintained that the advance upon gold would prove the ruin of the national credit. That advance, on the contrary, he considered as temporary, and caused by fortuitous circumstances, which must cease in a few years, when the Bank of England would, as he asserted, be again enabled to resume its payments in cash, notwithstanding the existing pressure and the gloomy predictions of the timid and discontented.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

*Desponding State of the Opposition.—Assassination of Mr Perceval.—Mr. Sheridan apprized of that Event at Stafford.—Measures adopted for a new Administration.—Disappointment of the Party.—Their Resentment against Mr. Sheridan.—His Endeavours to exculpate himself.—Attacked in the Morning Chronicle.—Observations on his Conduct.—His last Speech in Parliament.—Defeated at Stafford.—Deserted by his old Associates.—Declension of his Health.—Embarrassed Circumstances.—Instance of his Humour and Intemperance.—Symptoms of Dissolution.—Arrested in his Bed.—Singular Instance of Brutality.—Unknown Kindness misrepresented.—Religious Consolation.—Death of Mr. Sheridan.—Particulars of his Funeral.—Account of his Family.—Poetical Tributes to his Memory.—Review of his Character.*

It was evident that a considerable change had taken place in the sentiments of the regent, respecting ministers and their opponents, some time before the expiration of the period assigned for the limitation of his powers. The hopes, therefore, of those persons who had flattered themselves with a speedy attainment of power and patronage were now clouded, when an event suddenly occurred which brought the object of their ambition almost immediately under their entire command.



This was the assassination of Mr. Perceval, in the lobby of the House of Commons, on the eleventh of May, 1812, of which melancholy catastrophe Mr. Sheridan was apprized by express at Stafford, whither he had gone in order to try his interest against the approaching general election. On the thirteenth of that month a meeting was held in the Town Hall, to consider the proper steps to be taken for the representation of the borough in the event of a dissolution of parliament. The mayor having taken the chair, Sir Oswald Moseley addressed the electors in a neat speech, and recommended Mr. Sheridan to them as one whom they had tried, and of whose patriotism they could have no doubt.

The candidate then came forward amidst reiterated acclamations: and having expressed his satisfaction at the promising appearance of the canvass, which he stated to be entirely in his favour among all ranks and descriptions of persons, he proceeded to observe, that it had been his intention to enter somewhat largely upon political topics, and the perilous state of the country; but the feelings excited by the dreadful intelligence brought the preceding night had so far interfered with his purpose, as to prevent him from assuming at that moment a tone of warmth, and from pointing censure at either men or measures. After noticing with grateful feeling an address which he had received from Stafford, and to which more than eight hundred signatures were affixed, strongly

approving of his conduct, Mr. Sheridan concluded by assuring the electors, that if they again chose him as one of their representatives, they would send to parliament a man whose price was not upon the earth to betray or desert the cause either of his country or his constituents. Resolutions were then passed, declaring that the conduct and principles of Mr. Sheridan, since his first election in 1780, fully entitled him to the cordial esteem and the perfect confidence of the borough; after which a handsome dinner was provided at the principal inn, and when the company broke up, he immediately set off for London. On his arrival Mr. Sheridan found, what he must naturally have expected, that steps were then taking for the arrangement of a new administration upon an extended and liberal scale. The arrangement was entrusted to the Marquis Wellesley; but as his lordship seemed to make a point of taking the lead in the cabinet, some serious differences arose at the moment when the official announcement of the new ministry was expected, and for three weeks the government appeared to be almost suspended. An attempt was next made, through the medium of Lord Moira, to effect the desired object; but, though the principal basis were agreed upon without the least necessity for explanation, a demur existed in consequence of the demand made by Lords Grey and Grenville, that the offices of the royal household should be included in the arrangements. Upon this point Lord Moira was not

prepared by any instruction ; but the prince was no sooner made acquainted with the requisition, than he very readily assented to the terms, rather than the country should sustain the least inconvenience by his partiality to the presence of old and tried servants. The noble earl, however, was less yielding ; and he considered the proposition as not only objectionable on public grounds, but particularly offensive to the feelings of his royal patron. In consequence of this pertinacity on the one hand, and unbending spirit on the other, the negotiations were abruptly terminated, and the Prince Regent was compelled to restore the old ministers, who had in the interim resigned their situations, and only continued in the discharge of the public duties of their respective offices till the final appointment of their successors. So extraordinary an affair could not fail to excite a general sensation, and give rise to many conjectures into the secret cause of a disappointment which tended to reflect very much upon the judgment or the sincerity of the parties who were chiefly concerned in the business. By some, and perhaps the greater part of the nation, the noble lords, who had refused their services to the state on account of a little domestic patronage, were severely censured, as actuated by narrow sentiments ; while others, who thought more deeply on the subject, conceived that the whole transaction savoured of political intrigue, and were therefore of opinion

that secret arts must have been used to prevent the negotiation from taking effect. That this was a very obvious inference, appeared from the consideration that the matter might have been settled by an early understanding and mutual explanation, especially when it was known that the principal persons of the household were prepared to resign their places, and that some of them had actually done so. Disappointment begets suspicion; and in such a feverish state, the slightest incidents are converted into matter for accusation, and almost every person becomes an object of jealousy. Unhappily for Mr. Sheridan, the part which he took in these occurrences, and the influence which he was supposed to possess in the councils of the Prince Regent, brought his conduct under the rigid investigation of his party, by whom he was directly charged with having interfered improperly in the course of the proceedings, and thus widened a breach, which, but for his meddling, might have been amicably closed. It was confidently asserted, and pretty generally believed, that he had exerted himself to prevent the resignation of the officers of the household, and neglected to inform the leaders of his party that such an intention was ever formed; and what was still worse, that he actually dissuaded Lord Moira from yielding in the smallest degree to the terms advanced by the chiefs of the opposition, as the necessary conditions of their acceptance of the seals of office. Even the efforts made



by Mr. Sheridan to renew the negotiations failed in restoring harmony, or in clearing up the misunderstanding which his conduct had occasioned ; and his attempts at explanation in answer to the charges directly brought against him by Mr. Ponsonby and Mr. Tierney, of having deceived the party for some private purpose, gave no satisfaction in the House of Commons, nor cleared up the mystery to the public. All that he could urge upon the subject amounted to nothing more than a confession that his wishes coincided with those of the prince, to whom he had written on the subject, as he conceived he had the right to do by virtue of his station as a privy counsellor ; and to express his concern that the noble lords who were so much offended with him, should, when all the great objects were conceded to them, have obstinately neglected the opportunity of serving the nation, because they could not get the removal of three white sticks.

The house heard Mr. Sheridan with great patience : and when he was taken suddenly ill while engaged in justifying himself from the aspersions which his character had sustained, an adjournment took place, and he resumed his defence on a subsequent day, but without making much impression upon the assembly at large, or advancing a single step in conciliating his ancient intimates. Through all this straining at an apology, it appeared evident that the orator laboured under a difficulty in ascer-

taining the degree of information which it might be prudent to disclose, so as to betray no part of that which he wished to conceal. His hostility to some of his party, however, was obvious; and enough appeared from his own statement to indicate more than a supposition that he had endeavoured to counteract their ambition, and to extend the circle of comprehension to a larger scale of circumference than they intended. If such was his object, and there certainly were many reasons to believe that he had something of the kind in contemplation, it is to be regretted that he did not act more openly in his endeavours to carry it into effect, and make at once a frank acknowledgment of his real purpose, at the time when he fell under so much censure, and exposed himself to pity by his awkward attempts at exculpation. Besides being goaded with great severity in the House of Commons, by those who laid the blame of their disappointment at his door, Mr. Sheridan had the mortification to find that it was resolved to hunt him down by the whole pack, through the medium of the very journal which but a little while before teemed with his praises, and which had been at all times the ready vehicle of his appeals to the public. But now the Morning Chronicle, as the organ of the party, assailed him without mercy; and one of its pasquinades, after the restoration of the old ministers to their seats on the treasury-bench, ran in the following terms: "The actors in the plot have

been various, and those who have played the most prominent parts have been farthest from the real secret of the drama, the manager and contriver of which has hitherto kept himself in the back ground; and if his vanity would have allowed him to be silent, the piece might have gone off successfully, without any one suspecting who was its author. *SLY BOOTS* is a 'notable contriver,' but he has the misfortune to be leaky in his cups, and when overtaken, confirms the old adage *in vino veritas*."

This little history of political intrigue would afford ample scope for reflection, as it shews the low state of bondage into which men of talent plunge themselves when they enlist in the ranks of a party, and sacrifice the independent energies of their own judgment for the sake of standing well with the junto to which they belong. An opposition is extremely necessary, and cannot indeed be avoided in a free assembly; but it should be the opposition of unshackled minds acting upon their own perceptions, and in pursuance of their own principles; not an organic discipline, from the rules and forms of which no member shall be allowed to deviate without being scourged as a delinquent, or branded as an apostate. In the present case, there is more than a probability that Mr. Sheridan wished to see a broad administration, comprising Lord Sidmouth, Mr. Canning, and some others, of whose integrity and abilities he entertained a high opinion; but whatever were his motives or his views, he wanted

steadiness to avow them publicly at the time to his political associates, and to explain them fully afterwards, when the derangement of all the propositions made for the introduction of a new ministry was attributed solely to his intrigues. From this period Mr. Sheridan declined rapidly in the estimation of the public; and being considered as a sort of deserter from the squadron, of which he had been for more than thirty years one of the most active leaders, his situation in the house presented an appearance so mortifying to human vanity, that he seems to have formed a resolution of retiring from parliament. This session was indeed his last, and he closed his political course on the twenty-first of July with one of the best speeches he ever delivered, on the subject of the overtures for peace which had recently been made by France.

Mr. Whitbread on the preceding evening had declared that he hurried up to town, because he conceived that ministers were highly reprehensible in having declined the proposals held out by the French government; and he gave it as his deliberate opinion, that the terms which had been offered were the very best that this nation had a right to expect for the establishment of a permanent peace. Mr. Sheridan protested against the reasoning of his friend, upon whom he threw some severe sarcasms for putting any faith in the perfidious professions of Buonaparte, whose overtures were, he said, nothing more than a wretched manœuvre to cloke



his designs upon Russia, and to deceive the people of France into a belief of his pacific intentions. Mr. Whitbread, who was evidently very much hurt by the irony with which he had been treated, replied in a strain of equal asperity; and Mr. Sheridan afterwards entered more largely into the character of Napoleon, describing his ambition as boundless, his rapacity as insatiable, and his treachery as notorious. Having drawn this faithful portraiture of the usurper, the orator observed, that though it was out of our power to command success, resistance was nevertheless indispensably necessary, even with the hazard of defeat: he then concluded in these animating words, which were his last in the House of Commons: "But if we fall, and if after our ruin there shall possibly arise an impartial historian, his language will be, 'Britain fell, and with her fell all the best securities for the charities of human life, the power, the honour, the fame, the glory, and the liberties not only of herself, but of the whole civilized world.'"

Thus set this political luminary in the sphere which he had for so many years enlivened by the brilliancy of his wit, and often delighted by the power of his eloquence. Parliament was shortly afterwards dissolved, and Mr. Sheridan again tried his strength at Stafford, where, however, notwithstanding the encouragement which he had experienced in the spring, he failed of success; nor had

he influence enough to command a seat for any other place.

Under these depressing circumstances did this extraordinary man retire from public life, without having the transient consolation of seeing that his departure was considered as a loss by those who had been used to court the aid of his talents. The world to him was now in a manner become a desert, in which there was little to cheer him amidst the gloom of neglect and the blast of penury ; where he was continually tormented by the importunities of clamorous creditors, and pursued with unrelaxing severity by the harpies of the law.

Harassed by continual vexations at a period when nature stands in need of repose and indulgence, it was not much to be wondered that a man so long accustomed to convivial pleasures should seek relief from the pressure of increasing embarrassments in the intoxicating means of forgetfulness. Unfortunately the habits of Mr. Sheridan had ever been of a description that unfitted him for application to business, and rendered him incapable of enduring misfortune with that firmness, which, if it does not remove trouble, takes away its sting. When, therefore, the trying season came, it found him unprepared to resist the violence of the storm, and unable to direct his steps by any plan that could secure him from future calamity. In such a bewildered state he increased

his difficulties by the efforts which he made to elude them, and accelerated his dissolution in endeavouring to drown the sense of his misery. Such is the heavy impost which men of eccentric genius have to pay for sacrificing their time and talents in uncertain pursuits, and to obtain a little ephemeral popularity. Mr. Sheridan always lived and acted without any regular system for the government of his conduct; the consequence of which was, as might have been expected, that he became the sport of capricious friendship; and when the winter of his days approached, he experienced the mutability of political connexions, and the folly of neglecting those resources which can alone support the mind in every exigency, and minister to its comfort in the dreariness of solitude. Home, though the abode of domestic virtue and affection, was no longer safe to a person so well known and so much sought after by numerous applicants; to avoid whose troublesome enquiries, and to gain a respite from anxiety, he passed much of his time in coffee-houses and taverns. Continual ebriety was the result of such a course of life; and the effects of it upon his constitution, which had been naturally a very robust one, soon appeared in his countenance and his manners. Yet, sinking now as he was into the lowest state of human declension, occasional sallies of humour escaped him, even when he was unable to stand, or scarcely to articulate. Coming very late one night out of a

tavern, he fell, and being too much overtaken with liquor to recover his feet, he was raised by some passengers, who asked his name and place of abode, to which he replied by referring to a coffee-house, and hiccupping that he was Mr. Wil-ber-force!

Some idea of his extraordinary stamina may be formed from the following incident. A person going to hear the debates in the House of Commons, called at the Exchequer Coffee-House, where his attention was fixed by a gentleman taking tea with a parcel of papers before him. Afterwards he called for a decanter of brandy, which he poured into a large glass, and drank off without diluting it in the least, and then walked away. The spectator soon followed, and went into the gallery of the house, where, to his astonishment, he heard one of the longest and most brilliant speeches he ever listened to delivered by this votary of Bacchus, who was no other than Mr. Sheridan.

But such libations, however invigorating they may be for a moment to the animal spirits, or even inspiring to genius, make dreadful inroads upon the vital system, and when persevered in, never fail to undermine the entire fabric. This was the case with Mr. Sheridan, upon whom the pernicious practice increased to such a degree, that at length his digestive powers were completely destroyed, his memory of course became impaired, and the symptoms of organic disease manifested themselves in a swelling of the extremities and an enlarge-



ment of the abdomen, which soon left nothing for hope.

The complication of disorders multiplied rapidly, and he was confined to his room, where, to aggravate the wretchedness of his situation, and the distress of his family, an officer forced his way and arrested him in his bed. After remaining a few days in the house, this callous being signified his intention of removing the dying prisoner to a spunging-house, which resolution he was only prevented from carrying into execution by the interposition of Dr. Baine, the physician, who said that his patient was in such an extremely weak and exhausted state, that to move him at all, even in his own house, would most probably be fatal ; but that if he were to be taken away in a violent manner, the agitation would most certainly be attended by immediate death, in which case he should feel it to be his duty to prosecute the officer for murder. This declaration had the proper effect, and the unfortunate victim was suffered to remain in the bosom of his afflicted family, from whom he received every kind attention, and all the comfort that could be administered. But as in such circumstances rumour will ever be busy in exaggerating the most desperate cases, it was industriously circulated that Mr. Sheridan was destitute of even the common necessities suited to his melancholy situation ; and some of the daily prints affected great indignation at the unfeeling conduct of persons of high distinction in

slighting an old favourite in distress. It was again currently reported, on the other hand, that a present of two hundred pounds had been sent for the use of Mr. Sheridan by an illustrious personage, the acceptance of which was very rudely declined by the family. As this last story carried an implication with it unfavourable alike to all parties, it may be proper here to explain the real circumstances. One morning, Dr. Baine, in the round of visiting his patients, happened to meet a gentleman, who said that he was informed the finances of Mr. Sheridan were in so bad a state that even the ordinary comforts of life could not be provided for the want of means, and therefore he should be happy if the doctor would take charge of a draft for fifty pounds, to be laid out in such a manner as might be most beneficial, adding, that if one hundred and fifty pounds more were wanting, the sum should be at his service. Dr. Baine replied, that he had not observed any indications of such a difficulty as that which the offer was intended to remove, and therefore declined taking upon him a commission of so delicate a nature. The matter, however, being pressed with great earnestness, the benevolent physician consented to mention the circumstance, without naming from whom the offer came; which he accordingly did, and received for answer, that as the relatives of Mrs. Sheridan took care to supply all that was requisite for her own comfort and that of her husband, she must decline

the proffered assistance. This simple incident, which of itself evinced nothing more than the sentiment of generous feeling and sympathetic tenderness, was by artful contrivance worked up into a tale of slanderous insinuation, to pamper idle curiosity; or to gratify insatiate malevolence.

As far as sympathetic solicitude could administer relief or comfort, Mr. Sheridan received every consolation from the kind attention of a numerous acquaintance and an affectionate family. But there is abundant reason to hope that his last moments were cheered by the more abundant consolation that alone springs from faith and repentance. Some days before his death, the Bishop of London, who is a near relation of Mrs. Sheridan, desired Dr. Baine to ask if it would be agreeable to his patient to have prayers offered up by his bed-side. When the commission was imparted to the sick, he assented with such an expression of fervent desire, that the bishop was instantly sent for, who lost no time in attending to the solemn call, and, accompanied by the physician, read several offices of devotion suited to the awful occasion. In these prayers, Mr. Sheridan appeared to join with humility and aspiration, clasping his hands, bending his head, and lifting up his eyes, significant of that penitential frame of mind which becomes every human spirit in its passage out of time into eternity. After this he seemed to possess much internal tranquillity until life ebbed

gradually away, and he departed, without any apparent struggle or agony, in the arms of his affectionate consort, on Sunday, at noon, July the seventh, 1816, in the sixty-fifth year of his age.

As it was deemed advisable that the funeral should be conducted without pomp, and yet be marked by a proper respect to the talents of the deceased, the body was removed from Saville Row, to the house of Mr. Peter Moore, in Great George Street, Westminster, which being a short distance from the Abbey, rendered a walking procession the more convenient. It is proper to mention this, because some stupid accounts have strangely ascribed the removal to the fear of Mr. Sheridan's friends that the corpse would be arrested in its progress to the grave; an idea that never occurred to any imagination except that of the ignorant fabricator of the report.

The funeral took place on the Saturday following, and was attended by a most respectable assemblage, among whom were the Dukes of York and Sussex, and several of the nobility; the pall being borne by the Duke of Bedford, Earl Mulgrave, Lord Holland, the Earl of Lauderdale, the Bishop of London, and Lord Robert Spenser. Mr. Charles Brinsley Sheridan was chief mourner, supported by Henry Ogle, Esq. the Hon. E. Bouverie, William Linley, Esq. Henry Streatfield, Esq. Sir Charles Asgill, Bart. and C. W. Ward, Esq.

It is remarkable that some difficulty arose to



find a vacant spot for the interment, but at length one only was obtained, near the remains of Garrick, to whom Mr. Sheridan was indebted for substantial patronage, and to Cumberland, whom he had wantonly held up to public opprobrium.

As yet no other memorial records the spot where his body lies than a plain flat stone with this inscription :

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN,

BORN 1751,

DIED 7TH JULY, 1816.

THIS MARBLE IS THE TRIBUTE OF AN ATTACHED

FRIEND,

PETER MOORE.

Mr. Sheridan left two sons, one by his first wife and one by his second. Thomas, the eldest, was for some time manager of Drury Lane theatre, and afterwards successively aid-de-camp to Earl Moira in Scotland, and muster-master-general in Ireland. He married a daughter of Sir John Callender; but inheriting a consumptive constitution from his mother, it was found expedient for him to try a warm climate, on which account he procured an appointment at the Cape of Good Hope, where he now resides. Mr. Charles Francis Sheridan, the second son, is at present a student at the University of Cambridge, where he has obtained academical honours by his classical compositions.

It would have been unpardonable in the votaries of the muses to have witnessed the setting of such a star as Mr. Sheridan without paying some tribute to his memory. And yet, though a few elegiac pieces made their appearance on the occasion, none of them are deserving of particular notice; not even excepting the monody delivered with great pomp at Drury Lane Theatre, and concluding in a strain of panegyric very similar to the doggrel found in country church-yards:

Long shall we seek his likeness—long in vain,  
And turn to all of him which may remain,  
Sighing that Nature form'd but one such man,  
And broke the die—in moulding SHERIDAN!

Hyperbolical nonsense like this is any thing but praise; and the reader who had no other knowledge of the subject than what the lines convey would be at a loss to understand them as meant for irony or panegyric.

Mr. Sheridan was unquestionably a man of acute intellectual powers, which only wanted the correction of a disciplined judgment, and a proper direction, to have rendered him an ornament of society. But, unfortunately, at the outset of life he was thrown upon the stream without any friendly guide, and suffered to make pleasure his business, when he should have been employed in improving the early knowledge which he had obtained, and applying it to practical purposes in honourable

pursuits. The habits of dissipation which he acquired at Bath remained with him through life; and it may be questioned whether the generosity of Garrick, in relinquishing to him the management of Drury Lane, was not in reality injurious where it was intended for a benefit. Whatever were the talents of Mr. Sheridan for the direction of such a concern, he wanted the radical qualification of steadiness and regularity to conduct it with advantage. In one instance he rendered eminent service to the interests of the stage, by putting an end to the jealousy which had long subsisted between the two theatres, and forming a treaty with Mr. Harris for the general benefit, though their joint purchase of the Opera House was certainly an act of imprudence, of which both had reason to repent, no less than the public, since hereby, in all probability, the legitimate English drama experienced an eclipse. The expectation originally formed from the connexion of Mr. Sheridan with the theatre was miserably and speedily disappointed; nor did he ever take pains to regain the public confidence by exerting his own genius, or encouraging that of others, for the entertainment of the town. Many complaints were made respecting the management, but to all of these he appeared perfectly indifferent; and even when new pieces were submitted to his perusal, he commonly threw them aside, and on being pressed for a decision upon them, the ma-

nuscripts were either returned unread or could not be found. The case of poor Tobin was remarkably hard, for had his pieces been examined in due time, and represented as they deserved, in all likelihood the author might have been yet living in the full exercise of his vigorous fancy both for his own comfort, and the delight of the lovers of the drama.

This indolence on the part of the manager was the more inexcusable, because he possessed sufficient discernment to appreciate the poetic merits of the productions which were presented for his approbation; and yet while he rejected compositions of sterling value, he suffered others of the most despicable character to make their appearance, and vitiate the public taste, contrary to the sober dictates of his own judgment. Of this, many instances might be adduced; but one anecdote will tell for the whole. When the *CASTLE SPECTRE* came out, set off with all that art could contrive to render it fascinating, a dispute one day arose about it between the manager and the author, upon which the latter offered to wager all that the piece had produced to confirm what he advanced. "No," said Sheridan, "I can't afford to do that; but I'll readily bet you all that it is worth."

To the remarks which have already been made upon his literary productions in the order of their publication, nothing more need here be added, since the reputation of his acknowledged pieces is



too well secured to be easily shaken by the severity of criticism. In an early part of this memoir, some doubt was expressed respecting his claim to the version of the love epistles of Aristenætus; but subsequent information has confirmed his right to a share in that translation, in conjunction with Mr. Halhed, the orientalist. Besides this publication, Mr. Sheridan printed an epistle to Mr. Dundas on the government of India; in 1796, a speech in the House of Commons on the motion respecting the army establishments in 1802; and several fugitive pieces in prose and verse, most of which were anonymously sent into the world. It is, however, to be regretted, that an imagination naturally vigorous, and capable of the higher flights of dramatic poetry, should have been for the most part wasted upon trifles, or perverted to political conflicts in subservience to the intrigues of party; yet, so strangely do men of lively genius miscalculate their powers, Mr. Sheridan forsook the path where he might have shone unrivalled, to embark in a course for which his only qualification was a dazzling eloquence. That oratory is a desirable ornament in itself, and peculiarly necessary to those who are engaged in the discussion of public affairs, must be admitted; but it is a miserable delusion to suppose that this is the primary requisite in the character of a statesman; and that he who has the power of commanding the attention of a popular assembly by the copiousness of his

language, the art of persuasion, and the ingenuity of his arguments, is, therefore, to be considered as competent to direct the concerns of a great empire. So easy is it, however, to gain an influence over the passions of the multitude, among whom few are to be found that have the ability or the will to exercise reason, discrimination, and diligence, in the examination of political subjects, that the orator who shall condescend to feed their humours and inflame their discontent, will never fail to obtain temporary celebrity, while men of superior knowledge and virtue are despised. Here the misfortune is, that conscientious integrity and solid talents are held in little estimation; and a sort of premium is offered by the public credulity to those who have the address to take an advantage of it. Hence many states have been thrown into anarchy by the declamations of men skilled in the art of fomenting divisions and magnifying evils, but wholly destitute of the ability or virtue to direct their fellow citizens for the general good. Popular oratory, in fact, is an engine of which it would be difficult to determine whether the benefit it may have occasionally produced is an atonement adequate to the extent of its mischief. With regard to communities, it tends directly to excite disaffection and insubordination, to bring government into contempt, to weaken its councils, and to render those measures inefficient which have for their object the national welfare. Clamours

against the most salutary regulations are easily raised by crafty men, whose private interests or inordinate ambition are likely to be thereby limited and counteracted. Independently of this, the influence of popular speakers upon public opinion generates a spirit of disquietude, which never rests till one innovation succeeds another with empirical effect, and leaves the commonwealth at last either a prey to petty tyrants, or the victim of a foreign foe. It is curious to observe the vaunting praise which the greatest master of eloquence among the Romans bestows upon his art when he describes the complete orator as combining the perfection of virtue with universality of science; and yet, unfortunately for the pride of human wisdom, they who have attained the loftiest eminence in this respect have had little else of which they could make their boast. We have seen, and unhappily we are doomed still to witness, the facility with which men of slender attainments and loose morals can gain an ascendancy over the public mind, and inflame it to extravagance by the grossest misrepresentation. This is an awful symptom of national decay, because it indicates a greater confidence in specious talent than trust in substantial virtue; more admiration of profession than regard to principle; and that which is most fatal of all, an utter indifference to the private character of public persons.

These reflections naturally arise from a survey

of the change which has taken place in regard to political morality within the last thirty years. That the end justifies the means; that any artifices are lawful against ministers; and that any deceptions may be employed to inflame those who are willing to be deluded; may be reckoned among the tactics by which the opposition to government has been directed within that eventful period. The part which Mr. Sheridan acted in conjunction with the great leader, to whom he was attached, has already been amply detailed; and the review will clearly prove, that while as an orator he was pre-eminent among his contemporaries, in all the paramount qualities of a statesman he was completely deficient. He was a rhetorician of singular ability, but nothing more; though, unquestionably, had he been duly economical of his time, and diligent in the improvement of his talents, he might have moved in the public sphere with equal benefit to the state and to himself, instead of exciting momentary admiration as a meteor, and leaving behind him hardly any other memorials of his genius than its hallucinations. At the outset of his parliamentary career, he evidently had the manner of Burke in contemplation; and he in many instances imitated that extraordinary man with great success: but though he had a fancy vivid and inventive, a rich variety of language, and an inexhaustible spirit of humour, he wanted the stores of knowledge, indefatigable industry,



and depth of penetration, which distinguished the model he had chosen. In readiness of wit Mr. Sheridan perhaps excelled both Burke and every other speaker in the House of Commons; but though he rarely failed to produce mirth, he often disgusted his hearers by the coarseness of his sallies, and the repetition of his jokes. When he had once succeeded in bringing his audience into good humour, he was too apt to trespass beyond decorum, and to tire their patience by discursive flights, which at length had the appearance of trick and buffoonery. In combating an antagonist he was uncommonly dexterous, generally watching for a vulnerable point in some defective argument, far-fetched illustration, or inapposite precedent; and having secured his object, whether he understood the general reasoning on the matter in debate or not, he managed his attack in such a way as to make the most trifling advantage wear the appearance of a complete victory.

On such occasions, however, he was sometimes unmercifully severe, and dealt out his sarcasms with an eagerness that looked like personal enmity and the triumph of vindictive malignity. With these powers, he was, therefore, a valuable accession to his party; but it is doubtful whether he did not in many instances sacrifice to that attachment his real opinion, and for the sake of apparent consistency, oppose the very measures which he in his judgment knew were for the

good of the country. It is natural to form this conclusion from some parts of his public conduct; as when he came forward singly, during the secession of his party, to assist government in bringing the misguided seamen to their duty; and when again, breaking through the spell by which he had been originally bound at the beginning of the French revolution, he roused his countrymen with the eloquence of Demosthenes, to resist the tyranny and usurpation which sprang out of that hot-bed of confusion. Here Sheridan gained immortal renown; and it is only to be regretted that such a mind should ever have been enthralled by the chains of party, and perverted to unworthy pursuits; that a man capable of essentially serving the interests of his country and the world should have sacrificed his independence for the whistling of a name, and abandon himself to indolence and dissipation.

In private life he was easy, good-natured, and sociable to excess; fond of company, but indifferent in the selection of his associates; lively in conversation, and communicative oftentimes to his own irreparable injury. Of his habitual carelessness, no greater proof can be given than that of his suffering letters to lie on his table for months unopened, which negligence, if it did not lessen the number of his friends, certainly had the effect sometimes of withdrawing their confidence, and lowering him in their esteem. He was, how-

ever, not easily put out of humour; and even the rude assaults which he occasionally had to sustain did not materially ruffle his temper, or commonly provoke him to reply with severity. The address with which he parried such attacks, and converted them to some use, will appear from the following anecdote.

As Mr. Sheridan was coming up to town in one of the public coaches, for the purpose of canvassing Westminster, at the time when Paull was his opponent, he found himself in company with two Westminster electors. In the course of conversation, one of them asked the other to whom he meant to give his vote? When his friend replied, "To Paull, certainly; for though I think him but a shabby sort of fellow, I would vote for any one rather than that rascal Sheridan!"

"Do you know Sheridan?" asked the stranger.

"Not I, Sir," answered the gentleman: "nor should I wish to know him."

The conversation dropped here; but when the party alighted to breakfast, Sheridan called aside the other gentleman, and said:—

"Pray who is that very agreeable friend of your's? He is one of the pleasantest fellows I ever met with, and I should be glad to know his name?"

"His name is Mr. T——: he is an eminent lawyer, and resides in Lincoln's Inn Fields."

Breakfast over, the party resumed their seats in

the coach; soon after which, Sheridan turned the discourse to the law. "It is," said he, "a fine profession. Men may rise from it to the highest eminence in the state; and it gives vast scope to the display of talent: many of the most virtuous and noble characters recorded in our history have been lawyers. I am sorry, however, to add, that some of the greatest rascals have also been lawyers; but of all the rascals of lawyers I ever heard of, the greatest is one T——, who lives in Lincoln's Inn Fields."

"I am Mr. T——," said the gentleman.

"And I am Mr. Sheridan," was the reply.

The jest was instantly seen; they shook hands, and instead of voting against the facetious orator, the lawyer exerted himself warmly in promoting his election.

In his person Mr. Sheridan was above the middle size, of a muscular form, and well proportioned: his features, before intemperance bloated the countenance, were regular and animated, particularly in the ardour of debate, when his eye, which was uncommonly brilliant, threw such a vivid force into his eloquence, as either indicated the emotions he felt, or those which he wished to excite. At the close of his days he frequently appeared in a state bordering upon stupefaction; his dress corresponding with the decay of mental dignity, and his conversation, which had long been the delight of the brightest circles, now losing all



the power of attraction through the sad infirmity, which he suffered to encroach over his moral energies, till its ascendancy was too firmly established to be shaken by advice, or the effects of it cured by medicine.

Such was Richard Brinsley Sheridan, whose memoir will be of service if it be regarded as a beacon pointing out the extreme danger of resting satisfied in the possession of splendid talents without applying them to any efficient and practical purposes in the great business of human life. In the language of an inimitable writer and inestimable moral teacher, this relation will not be wholly without its use, if those who languish under any part of his sufferings shall be enabled to fortify their patience by reflecting that they feel only those afflictions from which the abilities of Sheridan did not exempt him; or if those, who, in confidence of superior capacities or attainments, disregard the common maxims of life, shall be reminded that nothing will supply the want of prudence; and that negligence and irregularity, long continued, will make knowledge useless, wit ridiculous, and genius contemptible.

THE END.





